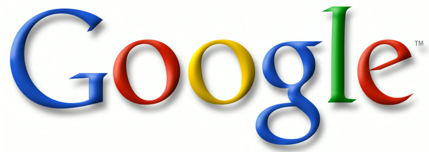

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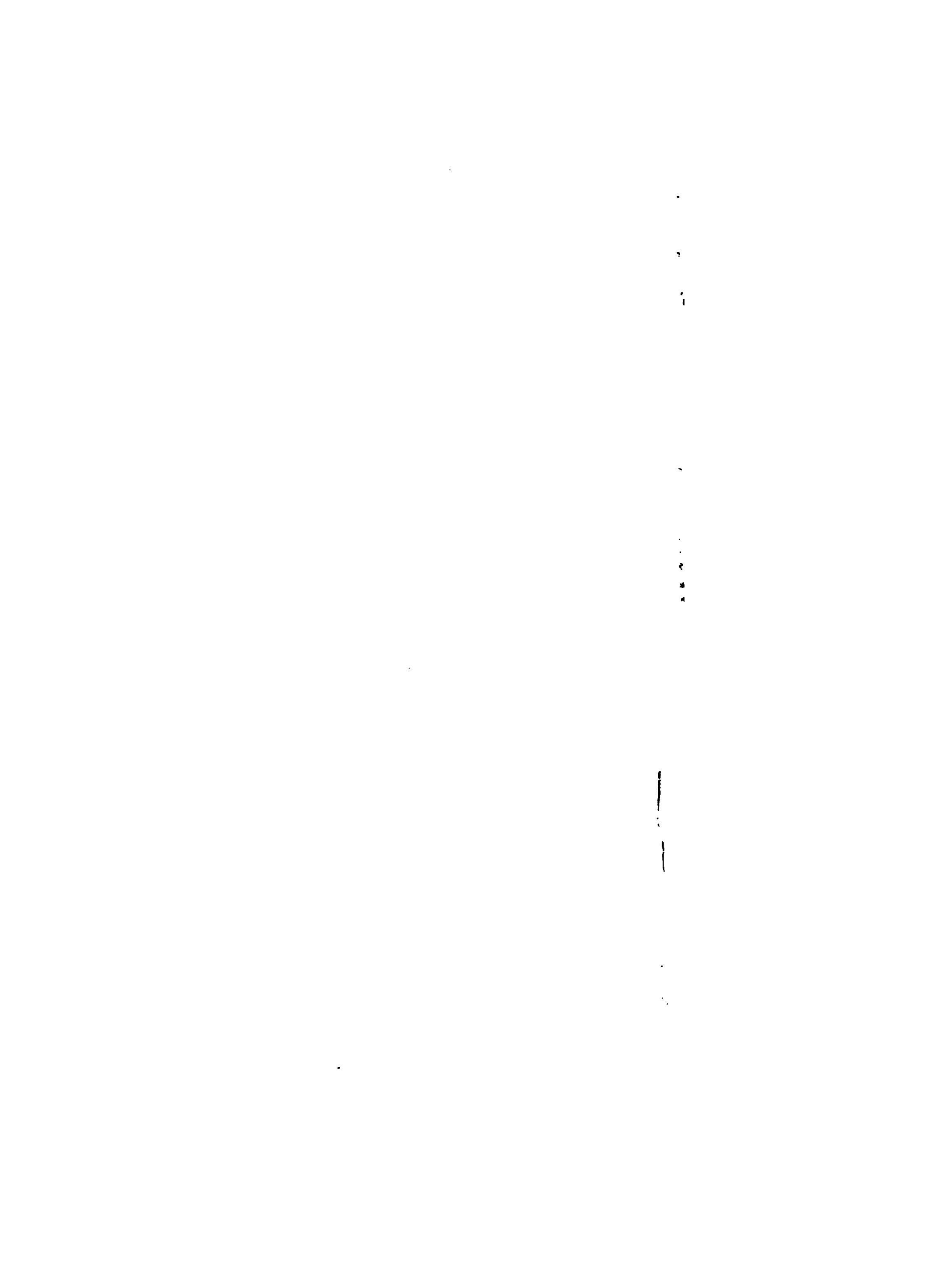

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NELL HAFFENDEN

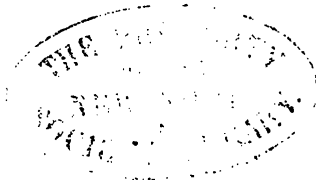
A Strictly Conventional Story

BY

TIGHE HOPKINS

AUTHOR OF

"THE NUGENTS OF CARRICONNA," "THE INCOMPLETE ADVENTURER,"
"LADY BONNIE'S EXPERIMENT," ETC.



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1896

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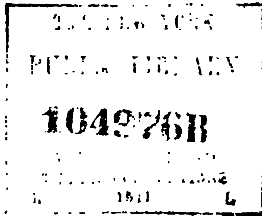

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TO

MY WIFE.

PREFACE.

THE author of NELL HAFFENDEN hopes that his readers in America will find nothing unkind and nothing too extravagant in the sketch of the Anglo-American boarding-house which occupies some pages of this story. It was, on the whole, a pleasant place, and the society merry and pungent. I spent a winter there some twelve or thirteen years ago, and made the acquaintance of the students whom I have assembled in these pages. The American Republic has read, with approval, Mr. Claypole's high and moving work on the English aristocracy, which he was so well qualified to write, and in which he was very stark and strait. I am told that Miss M'Gee is President of the United States; but as I have not been there, I cannot say. If I am to be abused for the professor, I shall plead in mitigation that he has "quit" pedagogy in Boston and Europe for the national industry of Chicago, whatever that may be. The boarding-house, which had a very real existence, has no existence

to-day; and I do not know the whereabouts or present calling of Miss Gripp and Joe. Mr. Meadowsweet continues to administer a parish in rural England, on a method which gives entire satisfaction to himself.

TIGHE HOPKINS.

HERNE BAY, KENT, March, 1896.

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NELL HAFFENDEN.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE VICAR'S STUDY.

"THIS surprises me," said the Rev. Frank Meadowsweet, "it really surprises me. But do you mean to tell me, Nell, that you did all this yourself?"

The cause of Mr. Meadowsweet's surprise stood upon the table. It was, in one sense, nothing other than a great piece of butter. It was, in another sense, a rather clever specimen of modelling. Out of a great block of fresh butter the girl had moulded a Grecian head. It was the head of a Perseus, and might have been taken to represent the look of the hero at the moment when he was about to slay Medusa.

"Yes, all myself!" said Nell.

"With what?" asked the old clergyman.

"Fingers! Mr. Meadowsweet;" and she spread out two shapely hands, the fingers of which were long and fine and nervous.

"Fingers, and nothing else, Nell?"

"Oh, yes! Mr. Meadowsweet; I did the finer parts with a bit of pointed stick."

"And a rather good use you made of that bit of pointed stick, my dear. Nell," said the Vicar, after a moment's pause, "we'll throw over the books, and you shall turn sculptor."

"A sculptor—I? Oh, Mr. Meadowsweet!"

"A sculptor—you? why not?" answered the Vicar.

"But I know nothing about it, I have had no training, I can do nothing, I—— Well, don't look at me in that terrible way, Mr. Meadowsweet, please. Of course I'll do

anything you like, and of course I long to be a sculptor, but——"

"Tell me, how long have you been doing this kind of thing?"

"Oh! I have been doing small things, flowers and leaves and such like, for a long while; but this was my great attempt. I have had to do it too quickly, though, lest the butter should not keep; it is to go to the show to-morrow. I got the idea when we were reading about Perseus and Danaë the other day."

"And you never told me a word about it! Stay, though, I remember something—do you call to mind, Nell, the first time I saw you? It must be thirteen or fourteen years ago."

"Yes, I remember; I was sitting in the churchyard, wasn't I?"

"You were—on a damp grave. It was old Johnny Boulder's; I had buried him only the day before; and I told you to go home, if you didn't want to lay the foundations of premature rheumatism."

"Yes, and I said that I couldn't go home until I had finished making a tombstone for poor old Johnny."

"You did; you were a ridiculous child. You were moulding a cherub out of six ounces of wet clay; and, upon my word, I remember thinking that you were doing it uncommonly well."

"Yes, Mr. Meadowsweet, that was the beginning of it. I used to go to the churchyard every day, and try to copy the carvings on the stones. And at home, when there was nothing to do in the house, I went to work at it again. I don't know how it came to me, or why I did it; but one day aunt found me trying to model a man, and said it was ridiculous, and threw the clay away. And another day I was making an angel, and she said it was wicked, and threw the clay away."

"Your aunt," interrupted the Vicar, "churns better butter, and is more punctual with her tithe than any other person in the parish; but I have sometimes wished that she were a little slower in judgment, and a trifle more deliberate in action. Go on, Nell."

"Well, that is nearly all, Mr. Meadowsweet; for after aunt had scolded me once or twice, and said she was quite

sure it was because I had made a molten image that the milk had turned sour three days running, I began to think she must be right, and I must be very wicked. So I gave up my modelling. And then you came to me, Mr. Meadowsweet, and brought me up here, and began to teach me, and gave me books to read; and for a long while I never thought about my clay images. Then after a while my fingers began to itch again, and one day I got the carrier to bring me some proper clay from the town, for the common clay fell to pieces directly; and I kept it in the garden-house, and used to steal away there and make things when I had time. Only I was ashamed to say anything about it to anybody. I—I have got a box full of queer clay things at home."

"Pick out the best of them, and bring them up to me to-morrow; and if there's anything in them we will make a sculptor of you, though you had a hundred aunts."

This conversation was taking place in the Vicar's study. It was an ideal retreat for a literary parson; small, but very snug, and nicely adapted to its purposes, both as to shape, arrangement, and fittings. From the window there was a rare view of the North Sea; the window was open, and with the salt breeze of the ocean was mingled the smell of rose, honeysuckle, and verbena. The furniture of the room was old, but the best of its kind. There was fine chasing on the panels of the rosewood cabinet, and the slender backs and legs of the chairs bespoke cunning workmanship. Bookcases filled with books, in bindings of red and blue and yellow leather, occupied the greater portion of the walls; and where they were not, there were pictures—English, Dutch, Italian, and German.

All this would seem to say that the Vicar was a rich man. But he was not; he was exceedingly poor. He had been rich once, but circumstances with which this tale has nothing to do took his wealth from him at a stroke, and left him to exist upon his stipend of £170 a year. He still had a fortune in his pictures, if he had chosen to sell them; but he preferred the canvases to their market price in gold, and, as a matter of fact, with his books and his paintings, the sea before him, the sky above him, the fields around him, and his handful of more or less contented parishioners, the Rev. Frank Meadowsweet was perfectly contented with his lot.

He was a tall, high-shouldered, grizzly old man, with deep-set, penetrating eyes, a genial expression of countenance, and an emphatic style of speech.

"But, Mr. Meadowsweet," began Nell again, "even suppose that you should think it worth while for me to go on with the modelling, what can I do down here? And you know I could not leave aunt."

"We shall see, we shall see," answered the Vicar. "If your aunt won't give you a corner to work in at home, you shall bring your clay up here. Who knows but one of these days we may be sending you up as a promising 'prentice to some sculptor's studio in town! Think of that; there's a prospect for you!"

"Yes, indeed; a grand prospect," said Nell. "And, oh! Mr. Meadowsweet, how I should like to do some real work."

"Ho, ho! Discontent, eh?"

"No, Mr. Meadowsweet, not discontent, but——"

"Unrest—give it a milder name. Wilton-Henry is a small place, and the world outside a big one, with fine chances for intelligent, impulsive young women who grow tired of their humdrum old tutors, eh?"

"No, no, Mr. Meadowsweet; why will you misunderstand me? You know that I could never tire with you."

"I do not misunderstand you, my dear child. But I know your feelings. They are natural. You would be no true pupil of mine if you had not such feelings. Haven't I been trying my best all these years that we have read and talked together to *make* you discontented? Well, my teaching begins to bear fruit. You are discontented; I am glad of it. We shall turn this to account somehow. Remember what I have always told you—the opportunity comes sooner or later; the thing is, to be ready to take it. After this, we shall go on with our regular studies; and if there be anything in the clay images, we shall give them a prominent place in the future. My dear, look at the clock! Run home! There are old Mrs. Benson and Mrs. Judson at the garden-gate, with some new domestic sorrows for me."

And Nell took up her dish of butter, which was for exhibition at the local flower-show, and prepared to go home, the Vicar putting on his wideawake, and following her into the garden.

"Well, Mrs. Benson, what new calamity with you?"

"If ye please, Mr. Meadowsweet, sir," and Mrs. Benson went on to repeat for the hundred-and-fiftieth time the tale of her son's misdoings in the village; and would the Vicar be so kind as to talk to him again?

"Well, well, send him to me, and I'll talk to him," said the Vicar; "but I've told you fifty times that he's a good lad, if you'll only manage him the right way. Meanwhile, let him get the Ten Commandments by heart, and put good thoughts into his head. Good evening to you. Now, Mrs. Judson, what am I to do for you?"

Mrs. Judson had a very sad story. Her daughter had just been confirmed, but the Bishop had performed the laying-on of hands with the left hand instead of the right, and she thought it couldn't be proper; and would the Vicar write to the Bishop and ask him to do it over again?

The Vicar's wrath rose.

"And do you suppose, woman, that they can *all* get his right hand? And do you mean to tell me that you think the left hand of a bishop one whit worse than his right? And is it possible that you don't know the virtue, the potency, the magic that reside in the left hand? Go in there; I shall expound this matter to you. I'll teach you to grumble at the left hand of a bishop!"

CHAPTER II.

"YES" OR "NO"?

AT the entrance to the wood, Nell paused to take breath, and throw a backward glance over the fields to the sea, far gleaming under the sun. The careless grace of her attitude as she leaned against the stile showed the free-flowing lines of her tall, slim figure. She had taken off her hat, and her crisp auburn hair—as beautiful in shadow as in sun—tumbled in thick heavy tresses about her shoulders, and strayed over her smooth white forehead into her eyes—deep-blue eyes.

Through the wood and into the open again. Along the path under the hedge, then over the brook at a bound, and up and down two or three small hills, until the smoke could be seen to curl from the chimney of the cottage in the dell.

Aunt Sarah herself stood in the doorway and peered through her spectacles, and lifted and shook a solemn finger when Nell came in sight.

"I've made tea twice, and the second lot's no better than the first now. You don't deserve a drop," said the spinster aunt, as Nell swung the garden gate behind her, and raced up the path.

"No, aunt, I don't, and you shouldn't have brewed twice."

"I shouldn't, I know it; but there, I'm a weak woman."

"You're not; you're the best and kindest aunt that ever was."

"Well, you've been up there, I suppose?" said Miss Haffenden, when she had placed Nell at the table. "Up

there," was Sarah's more or less contemptuous synonym for the Vicarage.

"Yes, aunt," meekly.

"Have you had anything to eat?"

"N-no, aunt," very meekly.

"Have you had anything to drink?"

"N-no, aunt," very meekly indeed.

"See that, now!" continued Sarah, half in anger, half in triumph.

"Yes, aunt."

"And I'll be bound, now, that you never gave a thought to victuals, either of you?"

"N-no, aunt."

"See that, now!"

"Oh, but aunt, dear aunt, what do you think that Mr. Meadowsweet says?"

"Says? Gracious mercy! he says endless. How should I know?"

Nell had been on the point of telling the Vicar's new idea for her future, but before the words were out of her mouth she thought of something more likely to please her aunt, and replied:

"He says you churn better butter than anybody in the parish, aunt—there!"

"Oh! a lot he knows about butter, Nell." But Miss Haffenden was mollified.

Nevertheless, Nell's delinquencies sat heavy on her aunt's mind, and presently she began again.

"Nell, what's it all coming to?"

"All what, aunty?"

"All this of skipping up there every day, and coming home with your arms full of books, and sitting up reading them o' nights when you ought to be abed (not to speak of candles at ninepence the pound), and talking to me about working at this, and working at that, and of making a name for yourself in the world. Gracious mercy! did I ever talk of making a name for myself in the world? Just tell me, Nell, what's it all coming to?"

"I don't know, aunty."

"You've learned endless of unbeknown stuff about printed books and picture daubs, and 'what a girl ought to do for herself in the world,' and such like; but what else,

Nell, what else? You can't churn butter within six weeks of your old aunt; no, nor darn stockings neither."

"I won't go to the Vicarage any more, aunty, if you don't wish it."

"Well, well, don't talk and look like that, Nell," said Aunt Sarah, suddenly relenting. "The parson likes you, and well he may, for you're cleverer than all them slips of girls in the village put together. Only I wish he'd teach you something a bit useful."

"Oh, aunty, aunty!"

"'Tis true, child, and I say it not in malice. I'm proud o' you, Nell; so bright and strong and clever as you are. And he shall teach you what he likes, and welcome. Kiss me, Nelly."

So the little quarrel ended, and Sarah, as always happened after a skirmish of this kind, was in a better humour than before.

"Said I churned the best butter in the parish, did he? *Well*, I do believe there's a kind of knowingness in the man now and then; if he didn't read such endless of books," she muttered to herself as she washed up the tea-things.

Nell, after tea, went to search for the "molten images" in the little box upstairs. But the box was nowhere to be found.

"Aunty, Aunt Sarah," she called, "have you seen my little box?"

"What, the box full of those clay things?"

"Yes."

"Gracious mercy! I found the whole lot up there when I was cleaning this morning, and threw them over the hedge!"

"*Oh! Aunt Sarah, how could you?*"

And Nell, with frightened face, ran downstairs and into the garden, and looked over the hedge.

There they lay in ruins, all her precious little models.

Cherubs with their heads off, little angels with their wings broken, saints reduced to the state of Dagon after his second fall, cows without their tails, sheep and horses with one, two, or three legs—everything maimed in some way.

Poor Nell plumped down in a bed of pansies, and a shower of tears followed.

Sarah was touched to the quick. "Nell," she said,

"Nelly, I never did think you cared like that about them. I thought likely you'd put 'em there to be out o' the way, and didn't want 'em, and forgotten all about them. And see, Nell, they're not all broke; there's a bonny little man there not hurt a bit. And, Nell, I've got you something else to take the place o' them; beautiful real china statues. Come in, and I'll show 'em to you."

And Nell dried her eyes, for her aunt had fished the three best models out of the heap, all untouched, and followed her into the cottage.

There, not without unction, Sarah unfolded from their paper wrappings, and set up on the table, two polished "china" images of the kind which the British labourer, when the sense of beauty in form first springs in him, purchases and places on his mantelpiece.

"Oh, Aunt Sarah, how kind of you; but—what are they?"

"Hear her!" said Miss Haffenden. "And she been a-reading up there about statues and daubs this ten year past! Haven't he learned you to know a cat from a dog up there?"

Sunset: a pink and golden sunset in an unblemished sky; a broad warm light over all the fields. Sarah was seated at her door knitting; Nell was on a three-legged stool, with one of her models in her lap, wondering how people grew to be famous sculptors and carve great statues.

"Nell," said Aunt Sarah, presently, "Martin was here this afternoon."

"Was he?" said Nell, in rather an absent tone.

"And he said you promised to meet him this evening," pursued Aunt Sarah.

"Then I suppose I ought to go?"

"You don't seem over-anxious about it, Nell. Most girls don't need putting in mind of a promise to meet their sweetheart."

"Are Martin and I sweethearts, aunt?"

"Well, aren't you?"

"I don't know, aunt."

"Well, I don't know who should know if you don't, Nelly," replied Miss Haffenden, a little gravely. "Any way, it don't appear seemly for a young girl to meet a young man o' nights unless they be keeping company."

"Oh, aunt—keeping company!"

"Tut! the style of it ain't good enough for her, eh? Well, my dear, keeping company, or sweethearting, or love-making—the *thing's* pretty much the same whatsoever you may call it. And, Nell, I'd like to see something settled between you and Martin. You wouldn't play with the man, would you, child?"

"No, aunt, indeed I would not; but—but why must we always talk of 'settling'? I don't think I want to 'settle.'"

"Well, come now, that's funny notions for a girl to have. There's many a one about here as would be glad to settle with Martin Clymo: farms his own land, not a deal older than yourself, and a comely chap too."

"Yes, aunt, but after I am settled, what then?"

"What then? Why, bless the girl! nothing; that's *the end* of it."

"Just so, aunty, but I don't want the end of it."

"Well now, upon my word! Oh, bless us all!"

"Yes, aunt," said Nell meekly.

"But Nell, child," said the old woman, very earnestly, "you're not serious-like, are you?"

"Dear aunt, yes; I think I am. Aunt, I don't know what I want, but this I do know, that I don't want to marry; at least, not yet."

"But, girl, what's to become of you?"

"Why, aunt, are we not very happy here? You don't want me to go away, do you?"

"Lord! no, Nelly; the child knows that well enough. But I'm not so young like as I was, and weaker this year past than I've been before. 'Tisn't a month agone since the doctor said, 'Miss Haffenden, be prepared; you might go in a day or a night,' said he. 'Ah, doctor, like the grass of the field,' said I; and 'Just so, Miss Haffenden,' said he. I didn't think much of it when he said it, for they've told me that before, but this week past I've felt a sort of slipping, slipping; and Nell, child, I want to feel before I go that there's a safe home for you for life. Martin Clymo can give you such a home, Nell, and he wants to."

The aunt let her needles fall in her lap, and, putting out a hand, touched the girl on the head, and Nell nestled close to her, as she had been used to do since childhood.

"You are not very well, aunty dear, to-night. You are nervous and troubled. Let me put you to bed; we will talk again to-morrow."

"I'd like thee, Nell, to promise me to marry Martin; 'twould make me very happy," and she fondled the girl's head affectionately.

"To-morrow, dear aunt; let us talk of it to-morrow. And see, the sun has set, it will be getting chilly; come in, and let me undress you."

"Look, Nell," said Miss Haffenden, as they turned to go in; "there's Martin going to the wood. Run, girl; 'tis always he who's there the first. Never mind me; I can undress myself," and kissing her, she made her go.

Nell went toward the wood slowly, and not so blithely as was her wont. The glow of the dying sun was yet in the sky, a soft light lingered over the fields, the tops of the trees were touched by it, and the air was cool and sweet. Many and many a time had Nell gone to the wood to meet Martin, but of late she had begun to talk with herself, and the silent questions that shaped themselves in her mind did not always find an answer. At best, the answer was often an unsatisfactory one, and Nell had begun to wonder whether she did right to meet her lover as of old. Her lover? Ay, it was that that troubled her: were they really lovers? That he loved her she did not doubt; but did she love him?

As a friend? yes, she loved him as a friend, and as one who had been her playmate and her childhood's sweetheart. But they were children no longer; he was a man and she a woman now.

And for many years their lives had been so different, though they had lived all that time within a stone's throw of each other.

Martin had lived the same life always; he owned the farm that had been his father's (Aunt Sarah was one of his tenants); he had grown his corn, had reared his cattle, had ridden his horse over the same fields day by day and year by year; he had thriven; but the world to him was bounded by the hedges of his own fields.

With Nell it had not been like this. The current of her life had been turned when the old Vicar first came to her,

and took her—then a child—and talked with her, and gave her books to read, and taught her, and showed her that she had a mind.

And all these vague hopes that he had stirred within her, these half-fledged desires, longings, ambitions—what should she do with them? Should she stifle them? They might be only "such stuff as dreams are made of." Should she cherish them? They might be of better worth.

And what of Martin? He believed her true; should she disappoint him?

"Late again, Nelly!"

"Aunt Sarah has not been well."

"Well, that's a better reason than usual, any way."

"Now, Martin, if you are not going to be nice, I shall go home again. I'm going to count five, and if you are not nice before I've finished I'm going home to Aunt Sarah. One—two—three—"

"Is Aunt Sarah *very* bad to-night?"

"Four—"

"And you've got on the hat I don't like."

"Fi—i—i—"

"Nell," said Martin suddenly, "how long is it since—since we said that we'd marry?"

"Talked about it, you mean, Martin, for I didn't really promise. I don't know how long it is; not so very long, I think."

"Ah! but it is; nigh upon a year; and somehow, Nell, I can't help fancying you've never been quite the same to me since then; not quite so nice, you know."

"But perhaps I *wanted* you to see the side that isn't 'quite so nice,' so that you might think over it again, and maybe change your mind."

"Nell," he said, speaking slowly, "there's isn't anything in the world could make me change my mind."

She did not answer, but he thought she looked troubled, and asked her.

"Does your mind change, Nelly?"

"To marry is a very serious thing, isn't it, Martin?" was her answer.

"Why, I don't know so much about that; but I don't see it can be so very serious, when people know one another as you and I do."

"Martin, you wouldn't have me marry you unless—unless——"

"Unless what, Nell?"

"Do you think," she began again, "do you think, Martin, that you and I are quite suited to one another?"

"Why not, Nelly?" he asked, a little impatiently.

"I'm a very bad housekeeper, you know."

"Oh! well, come; you're not so bad as all that, I expect," answered Martin magnanimously.

"I can't milk, Martin."

"Well, I don't say but 'twould be as well if you could; but there, we'll forgive you that."

"And all the cream goes to nothing when I try to churn."

"Ah! that's bad; still, I don't know but we might have a maid to churn for you, though 'twould come a little more expensive."

"And my bread always turns out heavy and——"

"Well, 'tis evident you have a good deal to learn, Nell, spite of your books, but I don't mind that; you'll have plenty of time, and you'll look handsome, Nell, sitting at one end of the table at a harvest supper."

Nell winced a little, as though she did not appraise this compliment at its full worth.

"You know you needn't give up your books altogether, Nell, though I think 'twill be as well that you should drop them bit by bit. And the old parson—well, I shan't mind your seeing him now and then, but you won't need to be running up there every day, as now, you know. Come, Nelly, what do you say? When shall it be?"

"But, Martin, dear—do not think me unreasonable—what is it that you propose to give me if you take away my books, and bring me out of my old life? I do not want to be idle, and I think that every woman, married or single, should have some useful work to do."

"Useful work? That's right, Nell; I like to hear that. Well, now, to begin with, there's the poultry."

"Oh, the poultry, Martin?"

"Yes, and there's the pigs."

"Oh, the pigs. Yes, to be sure; I had forgotten the pigs."

"Ah! you shouldn't forget the pigs, Nell. A lot depends on the pigs."

"Do you know, Martin, dear, I begin to wonder whether you and I would be altogether happy if we married." She spoke gently, and laid her hand on his; her manner had become serious again.

"What d'ye mean, Nell? You wouldn't throw me over, would you?" His face flushed, and he spoke a little hoarsely.

"Oh, Martin, no! But do not let us be in a hurry, dear Martin. I am not selfish or unkind. I think of you as well as of myself. Do not press this on me now. Let us wait a little longer, and think over it again."

"'Tis your aunt's wish that we should marry, Nell."

"I do not think my aunt would wish it if either of us thought that it were not for the best," she answered.

"You've kept me waiting a long while, Nell. It isn't fair that you should be putting me off like this. I think you ought to make it 'yes' or 'no' at once."

"Just a little longer, Martin. Indeed, I am not playing with you," and she lifted to him those deep-blue eyes of hers, whose pleading, I think, not many could resist.

"A week, then, Nell. I'll give you a week. Come, now, a week's a long while."

"In a week, then, Martin, I will tell you 'yes' or 'no.'"

"But it won't be 'no,' Nelly; it won't be 'no,' sweetheart, will it?"

"In a week," laughed she. "You have given me a week. I will not tell you until then. And now good night, Martin; it is almost dark."

"Won't you kiss me, Nelly?" She hesitated a moment, then turned her cheek to him, but broke away and ran almost before he could brush it with his lips.

Aunt Sarah had not gone to bed when she reached the cottage again.

"What, aunty, not in bed yet? But you look better; you *are* better, aren't you?"

"Yes, Nelly, yes; I'm well again. I don't know what 'twas that took me a while ago; but I'm well again. I thought I'd wait about till you came in."

"Yes, and now you must go to bed at once. I shall carry your supper to you in bed."

"Well, lass, is it settled?" asked her aunt, when they were saying good-night half an hour later.

"No, aunty; but perhaps it will be soon."

"I'm glad o' that, Nell, I'm glad o' that. I do want to see thee settled before I go."

"You are not going yet, dear aunt. We are going to live happily together for a long, long while to come."

"We have been very happy, Nell. Kiss me again. Good night, Nelly, good night."

CHAPTER III.

SORROW.

At sunrise, or a little after—before the fields had yet begun to feel the warmth, though a clear, calm light lay over them; and far off the waves foamed and sparkled as they rolled shoreward; when the birds alone possessed the trees and hedges—a casement was pushed open, and a fair face, framed by roses and ivy, looked out upon the world.

Two hours or more went by, and the sun was high and strong, and the dew was drying amongst the grasses, and the waters were white with the sails of ships, and the day and its work were well begun.

The casement was opened again, and the face peeped out once more, and this time there was a snatch of a light song. And by-and-by the song came near the level of the garden, and nearer, and the door of the cottage was unlatched, and Nell herself leaped out amongst the flowers.

For a little while from that there was a continuous bee-like flitting to and fro between the garden and the cottage; then the visits to the garden ceased, and there was an appetising noise within of bringing out plates and cups, and setting a kettle on the fire, and spreading of butter on toasted cakes. It is possible that Nell was not half such a bad housekeeper as she wanted Martin to believe.

At length, when everything seemed ready, there was a light call up the stairs of, "You may come now, aunty; breakfast is waiting."

Then a few final touches were added to the table, and the call was repeated, with the least emphasis on the last word.

Then, as usual, she stood by her aunt's chair, and waited to hear the opening of the door upstairs. But it was not opened.

Then she ran upstairs, still singing, and opened her aunt's door, and looked in. As she did so, the song left her lips, and her breath stopped, for she looked across the room to the narrow couch where Sarah Haffenden lay dead.

The room was just as Nell had seen it a few hours before, when she bade her aunt good-night. Through the partly-opened window the breeze came in, and played with the white blind. There was no sadness in the look of anything there, least of all in the still, pale face of the dead. The good aunt lay as if sleeping, one hand on the worn Bible that had been the lamp unto her feet and the light unto her path in life—in whose pages she had first taught Nell to read. Death had come very gently to her, and gently had she yielded to his summons.

Nell went softly and sat upon the bed, and took one of the dead hands in hers, and looked wonderingly upon the placid face.

A world of strange thought, of remembrance, of childish things forgotten, came into her mind. She saw all the past again. She remembered their coming to the village many years ago from some distant place in the south; her aunt's tenderness of her when a child; the queer, childish beginnings of her friendship with Martin; her aunt's teachings; the meeting with the Vicar, and the new and pleasant life which followed upon that. As far back as her thoughts were able to travel she could bring to mind no real sorrow; it seemed that all whom she had ever known had tried to make life happy to her; all the days had been days of gladness. Then the chill of the hand she held in hers struck into her, and she remembered again that the aunt, who had been mother and sister and friend as well, was dead, and knew that a golden chapter in her life was ended.

Then, at length, she flung herself upon the quiet figure on the bed, and poured out her heart in tears.

Presently a brusque, cheery voice was heard below:

"House there, house! Who's within? Where's the good Sarah, who churns the best butter in the parish?

Where's the faithless modeller, who should have brought her images to me?"

Nell went out into the garden, and down the path to the gate, and her old friend and tutor saw at once that this was not the Nell who had left him the afternoon before. The eyes were heavy with crying, there were lines under them, and the soft curves about the mouth were strained.

"Where is my Nell? This is not she," he said.

"She is upstairs, in aunt's room. Come, and you shall see," replied Nell, and led him to the house. She took him up to the room where the dead woman lay. The Vicar was shocked and greatly moved, for he knew well what the death of her aunt would be to Nell, and the change it must of necessity bring about in her life.

He stayed a little while, then went out and away from the house, taking Nell with him, and on through the fields till they came to the shore, talking all the while of cheerful things; then brought her gently back into the present, and soothed her with kindly recollections of the friend that was gone, trying all the while to accustom her to the change.

Then he took her to his own house, and the sight of the old room where she had known so many happy hours cheered her, until the thought came to her that perhaps her visits to the dear old Vicarage, and her friendship with its master, were nearly at an end. For just now the future was blank; she no longer knew what a day might bring to her.

"Mr. Meadowsweet," she said suddenly, all other feeling for the instant swallowed up in this, "shall I be able to come here any more?"

"We won't talk of that just now, Nell," he replied, for the old Vicar liked that thought no better than Nell.

It was late in the afternoon when she went home alone. She mounted at once to the little upper chamber, lifted the blind, and let the gentler light of evening steal in and fall upon the sleeper's face, which once again she kissed. She sat by the bedside until dusk had passed into twilight, and twilight into dark, listening with half her mind to the lessening sounds without, while the other half was far away in the life of bygone days. The stars came out, the moon climbed into the sky, but her vigil was still unbroken. Presently the room was flooded with a white light, in which

every object there took an outline of more than natural distinctness. The light vanished, after resting for a moment on the motionless form upon the bed, and on the form, almost as motionless, of the watcher beside it.

Nell closed her eyes; the outer world seemed for a moment to have gone from her. There was a murmur of music, low and exquisitely sweet, and she opened her eyes again. Once more the room shone with light, but it was not the light that had been there before; it was like no light that she had ever seen. She lifted her eyes, and beside her stood the figure of her aunt. It was not the aunt of yesterday, nor of the day before, but of many years ago, when no wrinkle had ploughed the face, and care had not bowed the form. She looked upon Nell and smiled, as Nell had seen her smile in those old days. A hand touched her on the forehead, not the cold hand she had held but a minute before, but warm as with the blood of life, and tender, as Nell remembered it. She rose, and would have spoken, but as she stood up the figure vanished, the light went, and the music ceased.

The room was in darkness, but Nell felt no fear. She believed that she had seen a vision, and she was comforted, so kindly had the vision been. She kissed the gentle face upon the pillow and went to bed without a fear, for a message had reached her from the dead.

CHAPTER IV.

BY THE MARGIN OF THE BROOK.

A FORTNIGHT went by. A change had come over the life of the Vicar's pupil ; not so much an outward as an inward change. She was no longer contented as she had been. She awoke in the morning with a restless, unsatisfied feeling; she found scant pleasure in the small details of her daily life in the cottage; she went oftener and stayed longer than ever at the Vicarage, where her old friend and tutor always welcomed her. Every one in the village knew of the unconventional friendship between the ancient parson and the niece of Sarah Haffenden, which had been accepted for years past as a familiar and quite permissible thing. For, though Nell had been the niece only of a humble woman, living with decent frugality upon a small annuity, the neighbours around and the villagers felt that she was not altogether one of them. She had not the look of a peasant girl, but this they set down to the fact that she did not work like the other girls; her skin was not brown, nor her hands hard, with labour in the fields. She did not talk like a peasant girl, but this was explained by her long intimacy with the clergyman, and by her book-learning, which was understood to be prodigious. No girl was jealous of Nell, for all the girls allowed that she was different from, and quite above, them ; and also, perhaps, because there was no self-assertion on Nell's part.

So she was allowed to visit at the Vicarage as often as she pleased, and no one had a word to say against it.

For the first few days after the aunt's death, Nell had thought much of her wish that she should marry Clymo.

In the first prostration of grief she had said that she would do it. Then, though her love and respect for the dead were all undiminished, she began to take counsel with her own heart, and found it less and less easy to resolve herself. Ought she to marry a man for whom she did not feel a lover's love? for the more she reasoned with herself, the more did she distrust her own feelings, the more did she doubt whether her heart toward Clymo were all that a lover's heart should be.

She thought of the promise she had given him, and remembered that after all it had not been a rigid one, and that even yet she might unmake it without dishonour. Should she do this, or should she fulfil the light and girlish pledge that she had given, hardly knowing then, or thinking, what it was that she gave?

No; she could not do it, she said to herself again and again; and yet what other course was open? If she could not marry him for love, she would not marry him at all; but what should she do if she refused him?

In looking over the few simple papers of her aunt, after the funeral, she had found a small packet addressed to herself, which contained a roll of bank-notes, amounting in all to seventy pounds. It was all the fortune the good Sarah had to leave her, but Nell had not looked for this, and she knew that to gather it her aunt must have dispensed with many a small necessity and comfort in the past.

For to her the little legacy of seventy pounds seemed wealth unbounded. What could she not do with a fifty-pound note and twenty pounds in gold? There must surely be a future in the world for a girl of two-and-twenty with means like this at her disposal!

She carried her thoughts to the Vicarage. From the Vicar she hid nothing. She had told him everything that interested her, everything about which she hoped, or feared, or doubted. The Vicar had never regarded with a too-kindly thought the prospect of her marrying Clymo, but upon this subject he departed from his habitual custom, and was sparing of counsel. All he had said was: "If you love him, Nell, marry him; if not, don't let him or anybody else prevail upon you."

It was the end of the first fortnight after the death of Sarah, and Nell was in the Vicar's study. She stood by

the open window, watching a seagull as it sailed slowly landward, and listening idly to the hum of bees, and the flutter of leaves in the garden. The Vicar was dusting one of his pictures, which he had taken from the wall.

"A farthing for your thoughts, Nell," he said presently.

"No, Mr. Meadowsweet, that's too cheap a rate," she answered.

"Times are bad; I'm threatened with a loss of tithe this year. Come, what are you thinking of?"

"Ever so many things, Mr. Meadowsweet," she said, turning about and facing him.

"A bad practice, as I've often told you; one thought at a time."

"Well, at this moment I'm thinking that it would be good if I took a needle and stitched up the hem of your coat. For the credit of the church, I think you ought to let me mend it."

"It was a good coat once," replied the Rev. Frank, looking with a rueful countenance upon the rather threadbare garment. "I got this coat in London; the purchase of it is the only agreeable recollection I have of my last visit there."

"Please tell me about London, Mr. Meadowsweet," said Nell. "*I* should like to go to London."

"I know it, Nell," replied the Vicar, still busy with his canvas.

"Then please advise me, Mr. Meadowsweet."

"How much money have you, Nell?"

"You know I have seventy pounds—not a penny less."

"Humph! Board and lodging at a guinea a week—cheap and not too nice. Do you know what life in London might be? Do you know what roughing it means?"

"I know nothing of that, Mr. Meadowsweet; how should I? But do not discourage me. I want to do nothing rashly; but I want to do something. My kind tutor, my friend, you have decided for me in many things, for many years; will you not decide for me in this?"

"So be it, Nell; but I won't take all the responsibility on myself; we'll decide it together. But not to-day. Let us think about it a little while longer. These are good," he said, turning over the models she had brought to show

him; "we ought to make something out of these; but not to-day; we'll think about it a while longer."

Meanwhile, what of Martin Clymo? Had her aunt lived, Nell's fate would have been settled a week ago; for she had promised to say him "yes" or "no," in seven days from the date of that meeting in the wood. Since then she had seen little of him, though he had been amongst the first to bring her words of kindness in her trouble. It may have been that Martin felt more certain of Nell now that the death of her aunt had left her alone in the world. All those wild fancies of hers which had given him uneasiness in the past; that queer talk (outlandish, Martin had always called it) about "independence," and the "work a woman ought to do," with which she used to meet his questions about their marriage—of this, he thought, there would surely now be an end. She had no home, she had no money (Martin, even if he had known of its existence, would not have given two thoughts to that little legacy); what could she do but take, and that right gladly, the offer he had made her? It might be—though this he did not like to think—that her heart was not yet wholly his; but, at any rate, she could not afford to despise the shelter he could give her.

Martin, you perceive, did not understand the ambitions of a young woman who had had a literary parson for her tutor. How should he? He had no ambitions himself. The business of man, so far as he apprehended it, was to see that the corn did not fail, that the beasts fattened in due time for the market, and, not least, as Martin himself had said, that all went well with the pigs. Of matters outside these, what need that a man should take note? And for the wife of a thriving young farmer ("such as me, now," thought Martin), what further could be desired in the way of distinction than that she should sit at the end of the table opposite to him at a harvest supper?

Martin loved Nell, but their paths had been divergent for a good while now, and he no longer knew her. He knew, though, that she was handsomer and cleverer than any other girl he had ever seen, and he had no doubt whatever as to her fitness to be his wife. It is probable, therefore,

that the death of Sarah Haffenden left Martin Clymo in a reasonably contented frame of mind.

On the evening after that talk in the Vicar's study, which has just been noted, Nell wandered alone by the brook which flowed beneath the bank of the garden.

Her heart was full of wild and eager fancies. She was thinking of the great city, the smoky metropolis, that lay many miles southward; and wondering, wondering, wondering, what hap would likely fall to a young girl who should venture alone into its midst.

She thought of its palaces, its great Cathedral and Abbey, its picture galleries, its many miles of streets, with the teeming and varied life that must always be flowing through them; she thought of the sermons which great preachers must be preaching always in the churches, of the lectures which men famous in science must be giving always to eager students, of the plays of Shakespeare played every night in every theatre; of these and many other strange and delightful things she thought, as she walked by the little tinkling brook.

Up the path to meet her came a man, at sight of whom she was recalled to the present. A young man, six or seven-and-twenty at the outside; features rather pale, eyes bright, but not too steady in their glance; height about the medium; figure strongly, yet not too strongly, built.

His step was hasty; there was expectancy, just tinged with anxiety, and a little excitement, in his look.

"I looked for you in the wood, Nell; you promised to be there," he said, when he stood beside her.

"I said perhaps, Martin; but I was going there; at least I think I was."

"You weren't in overmuch hurry, Nell."

"No, I am rather tired." She had felt no fatigue a minute before, but she was certainly conscious of a little weariness now. I don't know what it was in the presence of that well-made and well-looking young farmer that oppressed her. Yet she looked on him kindly, and spoke gently.

"Ah! too much books, I expect, Nell; it doesn't do for young women to overread themselves."

Nell said nothing.

"But never mind, Nell; you're going to change all that now, aren't you?"

"How so, Martin?"

"Why, when you're my wife, I mean." He smiled as he said this, but there was a sense almost of possession in the look and manner which accompanied the words.

"Martin," she said quietly, "I do not think that I can marry you." She had said those words to herself a dozen times within the last day or two, but they came with an effort now, and she was glad to have them out.

Her lover changed colour as she spoke; his pale face grew paler, and his fingers played nervously with the whip he held. But he tried to bring back his confidence.

"Nell," he said, with a forced laugh, "Nell, you don't mean that. You're playing with me. Come, say the other word; there's nothing to hinder us now," and he tried to take her hand.

"No, Martin, it cannot be," she answered.

"Then you're going to throw me over after all?" he said, changing from white to an angry red.

"Don't say that, Martin, please; I am doing what I believe to be the best. You would not have me marry you unless I loved you as—as a wife should love her husband?"

"Nell," he cried passionately, "I'd have you marry me with any feeling. Oh, you can't throw me over like this! You promised me, or almost the same thing; 'twas more than a half promise. You haven't quite given over loving me, have you?"

"I am afraid, Martin dear, that I never loved you; at least not in this way. I like you still, as I have always done; but I did not know my heart when I said that I might one day be your wife. I do know it now, and it forbids me to marry you. Oh, Martin, dear Martin, do not be angry with me! Let us be friends as we used to be; we were always happy together before you talked of this. Let us be friends only."

"No, Nell," he said slowly; "it can't be like that again. It must be marriage or nothing now. Be my wife, be my wife; there's no man can love you more than I do! I'll give you a home, Nell; I'll be a good husband to you; you shall do anything you like, only promise to marry me."

For a moment she wavered; he pleaded hard, there was

passion in his voice, and yearning in his eyes. But the next moment reason got the better of sympathy, and she knew that her resolve was the truest.

"Listen to me, dear Martin," she said gently. "You and I are not suited to each other. If we married we should be unhappy. Let us not make a great mistake. I am not unkind, Martin, or hard; I know, and you will know one day, that this way is the best."

"The parson has been turning you against me," he said sullenly. He was beginning to lose hope.

"He has not said one word against you," she said, flushing. "What I do, I do of my own will."

"Maybe you want to wed the parson, and wife it up there at the Vicarage," said Clymo coarsely.

"For shame, Martin!" was all her answer.

"I'm sorry, Nell," he said, struggling with the bad spirit that rose in him. "I don't rightly know what I say. Don't put me off with no hope at all, Nell. Say that some day, maybe, you'll change your mind, and think of me again."

"I shall think of you, Martin, but my mind will not change. But let us part friends; please, Martin, let us part friends. I have not many friends, I do not want to lose one."

"Have you said your last word to me, Nell? Are you going to leave me with no hope at all?"

"I cannot give you a false hope, and I have none other to give, Martin."

"Well, go your ways, and I hope the day won't come when you'll be sorry you refused me. I've done with you." And he turned on his heel and left her.

When he had gone Nell began to retrace her steps. She had feared that Martin would be angry, but she had not thought that he would treat her thus. "If we had only parted friends," she said to herself; and then, so bitter was it to quarrel, she was half inclined to run after him, and say that she would try to change her mind if he would make it up again. But she knew that her mind would never change.

Morning found her in a brighter mood. Her hopes and her fancies came back with the daylight and the sun. But she was more restless than ever. The spirit of

adventure had taken hold on her; she longed for change and a new life.

She went to the Vicar, and told him of her meeting with Martin and its result. The old man said something conventional in the way of condolence, but the tone of his voice, and the half-suppressed twinkle in his eye declared that he was much more inclined to congratulate her.

Then she led up again to the subject of their last conversation, and he saw, before she had said a dozen words, that she was bent on leaving him.

"You will go, eh?" said he.

"Am I wrong?" was the answer.

"I believe you're right. But think of it well."

"I have thought of it."

"Well, then, if you will go, you shall. But, Nell, I cannot help you after you have set your foot in London. I have but one friend there who can be of use to you, and he can only give you a roof over your head, and for that I'm afraid you will have to pay."

"Oh, but I can do that; I am rich. Who is your friend, Mr. Meadowsweet?"

"He is—don't be offended, Nell—he is part proprietor of a boarding-house."

"Oh! And what is your friend's name, Mr. Meadowsweet?"

"His name—once more I must ask you not to be offended—is Gripp. It has the advantage of brevity, and is easily pronounced. It is spelled G-r-i-double-p. When I say that Gripp is part proprietor, perhaps I slightly overrate his authority. Miss Gripp, the sister of Gripp, is the actual proprietor; Gripp does the work."

"And you think I had better go to the boarding-house of Mr. and Miss Gripp?"

"I do not think you can do better. I don't fancy life in a boarding-house myself, for I like to be able to keep my fellow-man at arm's length when, as occasionally happens, I am not sociably disposed. But at your age I should have liked it, and so I think will you."

"Then I had certainly better go there, Mr. Meadowsweet."

"It is all I can do for you, Nell; but I have faith in

you, and believe that, with the help of Joe—did I say that Joseph was his Christian name?—you will do the rest yourself. I wonder—I have wondered many times—whether I do right to let you venture out alone? But, Nell, if all should not go with you as I hope it may, you will come back here to me."

"My kind friend, my old best friend!"

"There, don't let us grow sentimental, Nell. I am too old for crying, and you have done more than enough lately."

The final arrangements were quickly made, for Nell's affairs took no long time to wind up. The cottage was to be handed over to Martin again; the Vicar was to sell the furniture, and hold the proceeds in trust for Nell. The end of another week saw her ready to start. The good-bye which she and the parson said together was a word which strained the hearts of both; but it was done, and they were parted.

But Nell had yet another pang. It was that Martin, who knew that she was going, had not shown himself. It was her last day, her last hour; she had turned her back on the cottage—stripped now of all that had held her to it. Where was Martin? Would he not come to say a simple good-bye? The train had whistled, it was moving, when a man came running along the platform.

"Nell!" he cried, "Nell, don't let us part like this. Let us say a kind good-bye."

"Oh, Martin, I am so glad!"

She was but just able to touch him with her finger-tips when the train carried them apart.

"Good-bye, Martin; we are friends, are we not?"

"Good-bye, Nell; yes, let us be friends again."

And the train swept into the tunnel, and Nell laid her head back against the cushion and cried a little in the dark. The train rushed along—past wide windy fields and flowering hedges, past meadows newly-mown and sweet, past tree and fence and gate, past river, stream, and brook, past farmyards and little lonely churches and quiet villages and pleasant towns; and on till it neared the great, many-sounding city. One by one the fields, with their greenness

and soft odours and gentle noises, were left behind, and in their stead came houses, ever thicker and more widely-spreading, until houses and houses only could be seen, with roofs stretching far as the horizon's line, and chimneys blackening the sky. Then the speed slackened, and the train rolled slowly along the platform, and Nell found herself amid the rattle and chaos of a London terminus.

CHAPTER V.

NO. 102, KEPPEL STREET, BLOOMSBURY.

LONDON, on a soft evening in June. The sun gleaming warm on the pleasant parks eastward and westward; softening the hard outlines of houses; lighting up great squares and streets both fair and ugly, and dingy gardens, and the sweet green places beneath the walls of aged churches; streaming through narrow by-ways, and into dull dim courts and alleys, where the sky is seldom seen for smoke and grime and bricks. The streets crowded everywhere; the din of multitudinous traffic—a very curious sound to one newly come from stilly fields and a lonely beach, whose ear is haunted yet by the plash of waves and the song of birds. Theatres just preparing to open their doors, and here and there a church bell calling people to come and forget for a moment the unrest of the busy world.

Through the hard ugliness of the Euston Road, and the gaunt respectability of Gower Street, Nell and her small belongings were carried in a four-wheeled cab.

With her face close-pressed against the window, she took her first eager glance at the streets of London. They seemed to her to be thronged as if for a festival or holiday; she looked curiously into the face of every passer-by on the pavement, admired the stolid dignity of the policeman on his beat, found the very costermongers and errand-boys interesting, and thought the fat old woman with the fruit-stall at the door of the Metropolitan Station a veritable picture.

From Gower Street the cab turned into Keppel Street, and drew up at the door of No. 102. Nell let herself out,

and stepped on to the pavement. When the cabman had pulled the bell and knocked two or three times the door was opened, and a tall, broad-shouldered, cheery-looking man of sixty or thereabouts descended the steps with a gingerly gait, and held out his hand to Nell. It was not Mr. Gripp's custom to welcome boarders with a shake of the hand, for experience had taught him that overmuch friendliness at the outset was not infrequently followed by a too-familiar criticism of the details of the dinner, or the items of the weekly bill. But of such conduct from Nell his friend the Vicar had admonished him by letter that he need have no fear whatever. The upper part of Mr. Gripp's head was bald, he wore a faded military moustache, and a certain redness and raspiness about the cheeks and chin told that he had laid down his razor not three minutes before. A nervousness of manner, which was partly constitutional, and partly due to a long habit of doubting whether the joint would last through dinner, lent a certain awkwardness to his speech and movements. Nell, who in spite of her limited experience had a shrewd gift of discernment, received an impression of a good-natured kindly man who had had the bloom a little rubbed off him by contact with troublesome boarders.

"Ha! how d'ye do? Hum! glad to see you. Tired a little? Never mind your luggage, I'll see to that. Is this all you have? Well, I'm not sorry, for some of them bring such boxes that I often wonder how they're to be got upstairs, and Teresa does hate so to see the walls scratched. Now, you needn't stand there wagging your head, you've got your full fare; and if you insult the lady by biting the shilling I'll call the police. This way, Miss—Miss Huffendean, if you will be so kind."

He led the way into a good-sized room, where the table was laid for dinner. Nell noticed that the cloth was not overclean (it was Wednesday, and one cloth did duty for a week), that the furniture was no longer new, and that between the shabbiness of the wall-paper and the carpet there was not much to choose.

"They're all out at present," he said, dusting a wineglass with his coat-sleeve, "except Teresa, who has a headache." Miss Gripp, as Nell afterward learned, always had a headache when a new boarder arrived.

"Sit down, Miss—Miss Hiffendon," continued Mr. Gripp, "and let us make friends. As a friend of my old friend, you come not as an ordinary boarder, you know, and Frank has told me all about you. Very few of our boarders are permanent, but I hope you are likely to be with us longer than most of them."

"Your boarders are chiefly Americans, Mr. Meadowsweet has told me."

"All Americans. There is no country in the world like America, Miss—Miss Hoffindan. We call ours—hum! yes, we do—an Anglo-American Boarding House—'Gripp's Anglo-American Boarding House'—it is on the prospectus. We have numbered—eh? yes, we have, we have numbered amongst our inmates, from time to time, senators, members of congress, ministers, professors, students, professionals, and many others. We have not a full house at present, because—ha! the season has not been as good as usual. But we have a distinguished professor from Boston, with a party of young ladies under his care, a senator's wife, and a young gentleman just returned from a tour in China—is it China or Jamaica? No matter. They'll all be very pleased to have you amongst them. You'd like to go to your room, wouldn't you?"

"If you please."

"You've just time to take the dust off before dinner. I say to take off the dust. It will be on the table in ten minutes. There's no one in yet, but they'll all come with a rush in about seven minutes from now. They are never late for dinner. You will forgive me for showing you to your room myself, won't you? Teresa, as I said, has a headache; the cook also is not very well to-night" (she was at that moment, if the truth be told, lying with her head on the fender in the kitchen—the day being her birthday), "and the housemaid is taking her place. Now, if you please, Miss—Miss Daffenbin."

He led the way upstairs, Nell following. The carpet on the stairs was worn threadbare by the trampling of many stout pairs of boots, and the walls had suffered from the sharp corners of many trunks. Up three flights of stairs to a narrow landing, devoid of carpet, for the topmost boarders did not pay for that embellishment, and pausing on the highest step, Mr. Gripp pointed to a door opposite, and

said, "That is your room. Hum! You'll hear the bell presently. If you'd like a little hot water, I'll get it for you myself."

He said this with such a hearty goodwill that Nell forbore to laugh, and said, with thanks, that she did not want any.

"Fancy having that dear bald-headed old gentleman for a lady's-maid!" she said to herself when she had dismissed Mr. Gripp, and shut herself in her room.

It was a large room, meagrely and very plainly furnished, but Nell was much too excited to be fastidious. The insufficiency of light in the room was a more genuine grievance, and Nell felt a sense of imprisonment when she saw that there were iron bars across the window. There was, however, a glimpse of sky to be had, and the loss of landscape appeared to be no very serious matter, for when Nell had climbed on a chair and looked out between the bars, her eyes took in a monotonous expanse of slates and chimneys. No birds wheeling in clear blue air, no waving of green young corn and ripened meadow, no pageant of clouds, no shimmering of leaves in the sun, no fragrance of honeysuckle and rose. But, after all, it was London, and Nell was rather pleased than otherwise with this novel outlook.

The first bell rang, and she began to dress in haste. She had just finished a very simple toilet when a tap came on the door, and the voice of Mr. Gripp was heard outside.

"Hum! I beg your pardon — don't open the door, we can talk through the keyhole. Can you—I really feel that I am taking a liberty, but can you carve a fowl?"

"I have done it before now, but I'm not a good carver, and I never know where to strike for the wing," answered Nell from her bedroom.

"Thank you," whispered Mr. Gripp, through the keyhole; "it's of no great consequence where you strike, so you get the wing off somehow. Our boarders are generally so hungry that they like rather a vigorous than a delicate handling of the knife. Would you—I'm taking a great liberty on the first evening—but would you greatly object to sit at one end of the table and administer the fowl?"

By this time Nell had opened the door, on the other

side of which stood Mr. Gripp in an apologetic attitude, with a flushed and anxious face.

"It's rather a serious ordeal for the first evening," she said.

"It's not fair, I know," replied Mr. Gripp; "but if you could just manage it. Teresa is so very bad with the headache, and the cook not very well. You will? Thank you a thousand times. The professor and the senator's lady first, you know; the others will take their chance. And—hum!—will you forgive me if I mention for your guidance that fowls are five-and-six a pair? You will find plenty of stuffing inside: not too much of that for the professor, but plenty for the girls. I am greatly indebted to you;" and in his gratitude Mr. Gripp shook Nell warmly by the hand, and went downstairs as fast as a stiff leg would permit him. He came back and knocked at the door again, and whispered through the keyhole: "I forgot to say that the professor likes a good deal of gravy."

The second bell rang, the boarders having all come in together three minutes before; and Nell went down, in considerable trepidation.

She was a little surprised, and perhaps a trifle disappointed, to find on entering the room a table full of ladies and gentlemen, differing only in very minor particulars from what she would have expected to see in a similar company of English people. One or two of the younger ladies affected a rather dressy costume, and all of them wore their hair in a style which was novel to Nell; but there was nothing whatever to be frightened at. As for the gentlemen, their shirt-fronts and cuffs, if not dazzlingly white, had the outward and visible appearance of linen; weapons of war were conspicuously absent from their persons, and their boots, so far as Nell could perceive, were the unobtrusive pumps of conventional life. Also, they were people not without breeding, for they all stood up when Nell entered the room.

She made her way to that end of the table which was devoted to the fowls at five-and-six a pair, and Mr. Gripp proceeded to the business of introduction.

"Ha! Allow me, ladies and gentlemen—Miss—Miss Hiffendone——"

"Haffenden," said Nell, with a smile.

"I beg your pardon—such an original name, and Teresa so bad with—Miss Haffenden—Professor Jonas P. Chown, of Boston. There are few cities in the world like Boston——"

"The Hub of the universal earth," said the young gentleman recently returned from China, in a soft, slow voice.

"Mrs. Leland, wife of the distinguished senator of that name; one of America's brightest ornaments. Miss Minnie Leeson; Miss May Lorillard; Miss Grace Y. Anderson; Miss Mary Meadows; Mr. Victor J. Claypole, who has recently returned from the remote and interesting Empire of China."

"Not raised there, ma'am. Been sort of tourin' round a piece. My home is in the Flowery West of Amer'ca," explained Mr. Claypole, with a gentle inclination of the head toward Nell.

"Professor, will you ask a blessing?" said Mr. Gripp, which the professor did, with alacrity and a strong twang.

For a quarter of an hour after that Nell's attention was entirely taken up with the fowls; and the first observation she was called on to make was an apologetic reply to a request of the professor for more gravy. Nell was a good deal struck by the professor. He was tall and dark, of a benign, albeit somewhat hungry, countenance, with a fine expanse of forehead. Nell expected to find him interesting.

It was not until the fowls had been demolished that any of the boarders found their tongues. Then they began to talk. The professor and his young ladies had been to St. Paul's Cathedral that afternoon, and the girls were full of their visit.

"Oh my! It's just wonderful," said Miss Lorillard.

"I thought as I stood bareheaded beneath that mighty dome," began the professor, when, seeing that the fowls were about to be removed, he broke off and asked for another wing, and his thoughts as he stood beneath the mighty dome were left untold.

"It's a beautiful pile," said Mr. Victor J. Claypole (whom Nell, being at a loss to remember all the names, had made a mental note of as "The Young Man from China"), "but you don't show it up to rights. Now, if I were Queen Victoria, ma'am," he went on, addressing himself to Nell, "what do you reckon I'd do?"

"I have no idea," answered Nell.

"I'd pull down level with the earth every street for half a mile around, and give that cathedral a chance to shine."

Here the professor looked again at Nell, who hoped he might be going to discover the thoughts which had inspired him beneath the mighty dome.

"Will you be so kind, ma'am, as pass me the condiments?" said the professor; and Nell, not quite knowing what he meant, pushed the pepper toward him.

After dinner, everybody went to the drawing-room.

Amongst the young ladies under the care of the professor, Nell had been particularly struck by one who sat beside her at dinner. She was a girl, apparently of her own age, with an earnest face, who spoke but little; and while the others were chattering together after dinner, she occupied herself with a small portfolio in a distant corner of the room. Nell felt an interest in this quiet, studious girl, with the rapt, determined look on her face, and took an opportunity to sit near her. Throwing a timid glance over her shoulder, she saw that the girl was engaged with a sketch-book, and Nell's interest and curiosity were increased a hundredfold.

"May I look at your drawing?" she whispered; and the girl looked up with a pleased smile.

It was a sketch of an old London wharf which the girl was making from a few rough notes she had committed to her pocket-book.

"We got down into the riverside streets, after we'd been to St. Paul's, this afternoon," she said, "and I made a few notes of an old wharf by the river. The queerest old place—just what Dickens would have described. Ah! your London is a wonderful city; so full of variety—such odd corners; it ought to be a paradise to an artist. I wonder your artists don't make more of it."

They began to talk in free, girlish fashion; and Nell grew deeply interested. Her friend's name was Meadows, Mary Meadows. She was a year younger than Nell, and had come to England to continue her studies in art. From England she was going to Rome, and Nell's heart yearned as the girl described all that she expected to see and do in the Eternal City. Her father was a mighty man in Wall Street, who had told his daughter to spend whatever was

necessary in the prosecution of her studies. She was to have the best masters, was to see all the great galleries, and the girl said that she intended to exhaust the art treasuries of Italy, France, and Germany, before returning home. She meant, she said, to make a name for herself as an artist some day, and Nell could see that she spoke in earnest. She showed her a portfolio full of sketches which she had made during the few days she had been in London. Nell sighed a little in heart at sight of this work, but her own spirit was quickened by contact with that of the ardent young American.

There was another of the party for whom she had felt a sudden liking, from the moment of their introduction. It was Mrs. Leland, the wife of "one of America's brightest ornaments." A sweet, motherly-looking woman, long past her girlhood's beauty, but retaining a richness of form and charm of face that were scarcely less engaging. Her manner was quiet and rather reserved, but Nell had observed a look in her eyes which seemed to invite confidence, so that when she found herself beside Mrs. Leland in the course of the evening, she found no difficulty in talking.

"You have come to London all by yourself, my dear?"

"Yes; that was a matter of necessity. I had no one to come with me."

"And your relations; did they like you to come to London all alone?"

"I have no relations."

"No father, no mother, no sisters or brothers?"

"No; I do not know of a single living kinsman."

"Ah! my dear; but that is very sad."

"I have just lost a very dear relative. It is because she died, less than a month ago, that I have come to London."

"I feel for you very deeply, my dear. You are so young and so handsome to begin the world all alone in this great city. I fear your life must be lonely."

"It is a little lonely just at present, but that will soon pass. I am not quite without friends. I have one very dear old friend, a clergyman, in the country, from where I have come. And I have brought myself to London to do some work for my living, so I hope I shall not have much chance to be lonely."

"You are not rich, then, my dear?"

"I thought I was," laughed Nell, "but Mr. Meadowsweet says my fortune is not a very big one," and she told Mrs. Leland the amount of her legacy.

"No, that is not very much, indeed; but if you husband it, you will, I hope, find work to do before it is exhausted. I wish I were staying here a little longer, that I might be near you; but I am to sail for America in a few days. I have been to Paris to take my little girl to school."

"You are very kind to me; I wish indeed that you were going to remain."

"But I think you will get on, dear. You have a good and a strong face, as well as a beautiful one; and I don't think you will find the world too hard for you."

Before the evening was over, Nell had found that all the professor's young ladies were inclined to be very companionable. They had a hearty spontaneous way of making advances, a freedom from affectation, and an unconventionality of speech and manner which Nell, fresh from the prim monotony of a northern village, found very charming. She was able, too, to enter into their feeling of clanship, for with the exception of Miss Meadows, who only valued her wealth as a useful means to a desired end, they were all poor girls, like herself. They were students, young, sharp-witted, enthusiastic students, who had a full intention, when they got back to their New England homes, of turning to some practical account their intellectual and other experiences in the mother country. They were delighted to find that Nell was a worker like themselves.

"We're just as poor as niggers, you know, we three," said Miss Grace Y. Anderson, including Miss May Lorillard and Miss Minnie Leeson in a vigorous sweep of her arm, "and I reckon we've got to work." And Nell laughed, and said she was glad their careers were likely to have so much in common.

Nell went very contentedly to bed that night. The bracing air of the Yankee boarding-house was good for her. She had expected to find herself snubbed as a penniless girl, and she discovered, on the contrary, that her lack of sovereigns was a passport to the friendship of her fellow-boarders.

Far down beneath her window she could hear the

lessening roar of the streets ; she wondered whether it ever ceased entirely. Peering out through the bars, she could see the twinkling lamps, and the people still hurrying this way and that, as though they never meant to go to bed at all.

She unpacked her small belongings, and the last things she took from her box were the three best models, which had been rescued from the general destruction, and the well-worn Bible of her aunt.

Then she went to bed, and dreamed that the professor threatened her with a bowie-knife for giving him the leg instead of the wing of a fowl at five-and-six a pair.

CHAPTER VI.

IN WHICH A STALE INCIDENT BRINGS ABOUT A FAMILIAR SITUATION.

FOR a few minutes after breakfast the scene was always a lively one at No. 102, Keppel Street. When the meal was over, the professor, having laid aside his napkin with an air of mingled satisfaction and regret, would take his stand in the hall, and sing loudly through his nose: "All Aboard! all A-bo-erd!"

This was the signal to the young ladies that the professor was ready to start, and that they must look sharp if they didn't want to be left behind; for the professor, like time and tide, waited for no man—"no, nor woman neither." There was therefore immediately a great rushing together for hats and wraps, and maps and guide-books, and presently the party were assembled, and Mr. Gripp stood ready to indicate the best route to whatever place they were bound for.

When Mr. Gripp, to use his own words, first went into the boarding-house business, he was like most Londoners, profoundly ignorant of the London in which foreigners in general, and Americans in particular, are interested. The London, I mean, of history and romance. He had lived for many years within a stone's throw of the British Museum without, I believe, ever having entered its doors. He knew that St. Paul's was "in the City," and Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament somewhere in Westminster. He could have made his way to the National Gallery, as being in the neighbourhood of the Strand; but he could no more have gone unaided to the South Kensington Museum or the Tower than to Timbuctoo or the Pyramids.

But he had to mend his ignorance when he went into business, and before he had been his sister's factotum for six months he knew by heart the London which his boarders came to visit.

When the professor and his young charges had got their instructions—a main thing at starting was to know the least expensive route, and the smallest fees that could be tendered at any place—the professor said, "Weigh anchor!" or, "Now, ladies, we'll progress;" and off they went, the girls in long dust-cloaks reaching to their feet, their heads tied up in blue veils, and shod as for mountaineering.

They wanted Nell to go with them, and the young man from China, who generally made his pilgrimages alone, exhibited a grave eagerness to take her under his wing.

But Nell had a fancy to do her first sight-seeing by herself; and by-and-by, when the others had gone, she tripped out alone.

A strange, timid, wondering delight was hers when she first felt the stones of London beneath her little shoes. Everything she saw was new and beautiful: she was like Cinderella at the ball, like Psyche in the Palace of Cupid. She stood in Oxford Street and watched the traffic roll by; carriages and cabs, and great drays and wagons, and the neat carts of tradesmen, and omnibuses laden inside and out, and handsome young men driving their traps to the City. Then when her eyes were tired of this, she turned and began to walk westward. The crowds in the street puzzled her immensely—where were they going, all these people? where did they live, and what did they do every day of their lives?

And the shops—oh, the shops! There were the photograph shops, with their queer medley of portraits, bishops cheek by jowl with burlesque actresses, at whose costumes Nell grew hot and ashamed; members of Parliament, jockeys, titled ladies, distinguished criminals, soldiers, and princes in beautiful confusion. And the book-shops, before which Nell stood long and enviously; and the wonderful displays of millinery, silks, satins, and jewellery, which made her fairly gasp.

Presently she felt hungry, and, after much hesitation and examination of the contents of her purse, she ventured into a little Italian restaurant in Oxford Street. There, seated on a red velvet cushion, before a small marble-topped table, she felt that this was splendour indeed; and when a

pensive Italian, with a head of hair like a halo, brought her chocolate and sugared cakes on a burnished salver, she experienced a tremulous delight at the thought that she had entered by mistake one of the gilded haunts of the London aristocracy. "If Martin could see me now!" she said, with childish pride. And for all this there was only sevenpence to pay.

Leaving that lowly restaurant, she found herself, as she thought, a long way from home, and had the courage to stop an omnibus, and ask to be driven there.

"Where for, miss?" asked the conductor.

"Mr. Gripp's boarding-house, if you please."

"Dunno that, miss."

"The house is in Keppel Street," said Nell.

"Oh, ah! Keppel Street. Jump in, miss," and Nell found a fresh pleasure in her first ride in an omnibus. It is a pleasure that palls pretty quickly, even in the case of a fresh young stranger from the country, and Nell was not sorry to be set down. She looked up at the name of the street, but it was not Keppel Street. She went on a little way, and turned down another street, but it did not seem to bring her any nearer to Mr. Gripp's boarding-house. After walking a short distance she found herself beneath great iron rails, behind which, at a little distance, rose steps and pillars and great gray walls. Coming to an open gate, she asked of a venerable old man in uniform

"If you please, what building is this?"

"The British Museum, miss."

"Oh!" said Nell, with a long-drawn sigh of delight. "Is this really the British Museum?"

"Cert'ny, miss; straight on, and up the steps."

Up the steps, and through the glass swing-doors, and into the venerable musty pile. To Nell it was all fairyland.

She went from one room to another in a dream of astonishment and delight. It seemed to her that all the treasures of the world were gathered into this one building. She looked at books in gorgeous bindings, piled high in glass cases; at the bones of prehistoric creatures; at specimens ethnographical, geographical, zoological, and botanical, and then wandered from one to another of the great sculpture galleries, where he who runs may read the histories of Egypt, Assyria, Greece, and Rome. These were the places that

interested her most, for in the embodiments, in stone and clay and marble, of ancient lore and legend, she was carried back in fancy to the days when she learned of these things from the lips of her old tutor.

She wandered on until her steps were arrested in front of that surpassingly beautiful "head of a goddess," which stands on a table in the centre of the Bronze Room. Experts are in doubt whether this be the head of Aphrodite or Artemis, but Nell, being burdened by no theory on the subject, cared only for the beauty of the artist's work. She looked at it long, with the deep admiration of an artist for a great artist's creation, until at length, in complete exhaustion, she said:

"Enough of beauty for one day," and turned to leave the place.

She passed through the outer door, but found, when she reached the steps, that it was raining fast. Having nothing to protect her against a wetting, she stood to wait the pleasure of the sky. By-and-by the gray dome above grew lighter, and the rain fell less heavily; and as it was getting late, Nell began to think of running home. But which way to turn when she reached the gate?

"Oh, my! how to find Keppel Street?" she exclaimed, for she had no idea how far she was from Mr. Gripp's boarding-house.

"I beg your pardon, is that a conundrum?" asked a voice at her elbow.

Nell turned in haste; she had thought herself alone. Beside her stood an exceedingly handsome young man whom one would have taken to be about her own age.

"I beg your pardon," he said again, "but I never was good at conundrums."

"But it isn't a conundrum," replied Nell.

"I am greatly relieved," answered the gentleman.

Now, though this was rather an informal way of opening a conversation, which it was evidently the desire of the unknown to do, Nell did not think that he meant to be rude, for he had taken off his hat, and stood in a respectful attitude, and the look in his eyes, if a trifle quizzical, was very pleasant. Besides, he was so exceedingly handsome. Being slightly built, he looked a little taller than he really was, though his height was above the medium. His hair

was very fair, and just an inch or two longer than fashion required, with a tendency to waviness. He had a long drooping moustache; not of the massive and tawny description which latter-day romance has popularised, but slender and silky, and only a shade darker than his hair. A certain air of laziness, which was not out of keeping with their general expression, rested on the features, and the eyes were those of one disposed to dream, though the mouth was not wanting in strength.

"If it is only that you wish to be directed to Keppel Street, I shall be very happy to be allowed to do that small service for you," he said.

"Thank you; that is all I wish," replied Nell.

"But you had better wait a little, had you not?"

For that obstinate shower had begun to fall again, harder than ever; and clearly to venture out just then would be to incur an unpleasant wetting.

"Wet feet, cold in the head, and all the disagreeable rest of it," said the silky moustache.

"Does it often rain in London?" asked Nell.

"Well, upon my word, now you ask me, I don't think it often does anything else."

"Oh, please don't say that, or I shall be sorry I ever left the country."

"You are a stranger in London, then?"

"This is my first day in it. London is a very wonderful place, is it not?"

"There is perhaps a trifle too much of it."

"Oh, do you think so? But everything is so interesting."

"Y—yes?" in a tone of amused scepticism.

"Do you not think the British Museum a wonderful place?"

"I think it is the most astonishing place I was ever in. I have been hunting up and down it for the last two hours to find a thing which I have not found after all."

"Indeed, what is that?"

"A bronze head, head of a goddess they call it, Medea, or Jason, or——"

"But Medea was not a goddess, and Jason was—a man."

"You shame me. My classics have got very rusty, if

they were ever bright. I am almost afraid to try again, but may I venture upon Artemis?"

"Oh, I know now the head you mean. I have been looking at it for an hour or more. It is the most lovely thing I ever saw."

"Ah! How stupid of me not to find it! I shall have to come again."

Nell did not seem to think this a great hardship, and as that little summer shower had come to an end as suddenly as it had commenced, she said that she must get home without any more delay.

Then the fair-haired young man asked to be allowed to accompany her at least a part of the way, and as Nell did not want to lose herself a second time she consented. Not very unwillingly, either, I believe, for since she had discovered his fallibility in classics, and he had taken her correction in such genial part, she felt less on her dignity, and not so much afraid of him as she had done at first.

I regret to say that the young man did not lead Nell the shortest way to Keppel Street—nay, that he went the longest possible way; and Nell said once: "Do you think we are going quite right? I am almost sure it is the second time we have walked round this square." The squares in Bloomsbury are quiet and very pleasant on a summer's evening.

At that the young man blushed, and said it was a long while since he had been in that neighbourhood. But they came to Keppel Street, after a walk of about a mile and a half, and reached the door of Mr. Gripp's boarding-house.

"You have quite exhausted the Museum, I suppose?" said he.

"In one visit! oh no."

"And you will go there again?"

"Yes, I *must* see my goddess again."

"Ah! I must see that goddess, too."

"You are very kind to have brought me all the way home."

"The kindness is yours to have allowed me."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye; then I shall see you again at the Museum?"

"Oh, no; I did not say anything about that."

"But may I not hope that I shall see you there again?"

"I shall certainly go to see the goddess again."

CHAPTER VII.

MISS MAGGIE M'GEE.

DINNER as before; Nell again at the head of the table, presiding over a stew this time, to which, as she fancied, the professor did not take very kindly.

Nell had a great desire to converse with the professor, behind whose noble forehead she was sure there lay a noble brain. But to speak with him at table was not easy, for he devoted himself to his meals with an earnestness which precluded conversation.

As a rule, unless when a new boarder arrived, or some other event out of the ordinary occurred, the evenings at the boarding-house were not lively.

The boarders were tired out with their day's sight-seeing, and, having exhausted their conversational energies at dinner, gave themselves to letter-writing, or meditating (the professor and Mr. Claypole were great at this), or lounging over the chairs, table, and sofa, as none but Americans can lounge. Occasionally the professor kept school in a corner with the girls, questioning them upon the things they had seen during the day. But ordinarily he would sit by the hour together, with his eyes closed and his lips working silently.

The young man before mentioned used to conjecture that the professor at these times was wrestling in the spirit; but as a matter of fact, he was masticating jujubes and summing up in his mind the probable profits of the tour.

The young man from China was also fond of a quiet chair in the evening. He would repeat poetry—with which his memory was packed—half aloud and half to himself in

a peculiarly deliberate tone, which caused Miss Grace Y. Anderson to say more than once that "it would be real good if some one would go for him with a footstool."

When tired of reciting, he would fall back on his note-book or diary. He was storing up "impressions" of the mother country, which, as he informed Nell in private, were one day to be given to the world in a quarto volume. He had an odd way of refreshing his memory when he came to write up his diary of an evening. In going about the streets, he conversed with all sorts of people, and at the conclusion of one of these miscellaneous interviews, he made a tiny sketch on his thumb-nail or shirt-cuff, which served as a reminder when he needed to put the result upon paper.

"It will be a most interesting book, I am sure," said Nell, when he had in confidence imparted to her its plan and purpose.

"Well, ma'am," he replied, "I should presume that the untrammelled thoughts of a free-born citizen of Amer'ca upon the institootions of the old country, when put into print in a bold and careless style, will stir your folk up pretty considerable. I am going to dedicate my work to Queen Victoria."

Here the professor, who had been watching the pair for some little time, rose from his chair under the mantelpiece, and moving with heavy measured step across the room, seated himself beside Nell, Mr. Claypole giving him a kindly nod and retiring.

"I wish you a good evenin', ma'am," said the professor.

"Good evening, professor," replied Nell.

"I trust, ma'am, that you are in good health this evenin'?"

"In excellent health, professor, thank you."

"I am myself, ma'am, not precisely in the enjoyment of that health which I could desire."

"I am very sorry to hear it, professor. The air of London is not, I fear, so pure as your American air."

"It is not of the air that I complain, ma'am."

"The water of London, I have been told, is not quite all that it might be."

"I am not in a position to affirm or to deny that proposition, ma'am. I seldom drink water in an unmixed

state," which, as Nell had already had occasion to observe, was true. "Persons of my profession, ma'am, require a great deal of solid food."

The professor, for his part, not only required, but took it, which fact also Nell had had occasion to note.

"I have ventured to speak with you on this subject, ma'am, perceiving that you are about to take a share in the administration of the establishment. Ma'am, permit me, without further preamble, to assure you that in this house they have no idea whatever of the demands and capacities of the Human Stomach."

"Good gracious! professor, you astonish me."

She had herself helped him twice, and that largely, at dinner.

"It is three days, ma'am, since a pudding, worthy of the name, has been placed upon the table."

"But, professor, there was bread-pudding at one end of the table, and rice-pudding at the other end, this very evening," said Nell, repressing a strong desire to laugh.

"Oh, ma'am, what is a bread-pudding or a rice-pudding to one engaged in the profession of teaching? They are things to dally with, not to wrestle with."

Nell ventured to inquire what was the professor's favourite article in sweets.

"Ma'am," he replied earnestly, "my stomach is not a proud one. It does not ask to be pampered. Neither does it demand to be tickled, or, as I might say, irritated with foolish fanciful things that may gratify the eye, but do not satisfy the inward gnawings. But in the matter of pudding, it refuses to be trifled with."

"And what, if I may ask, professor, is your particular fancy in the matter of pudding?"

"In my country, in my younger days, ma'am, we had a stable and pleasant pudding compounded chiefly of flour and currants—a great deal of flour and not too many currants. It went by the name of spotted-mule, and was a pudding which demanded a healthy amount of effort and attention on the part of the eater."

"And doubtless, also, a strong digestion, professor."

"Perhaps so, ma'am; but my digestion has always been a strong one. May I be forgiven if I suggest that an establishment which knows nothing of spotted-mule is

scarcely deserving of the name of an American boarding-house."

"You may certainly, so far as I am concerned, professor, because I haven't anything to do with its management."

"But you are likely to have? I trust, ma'am, that you are likely to have."

"I do not think so. I am only a boarder like yourself."

"Is that so, ma'am?" and the professor sighed, and his face fell, and resumed its unsatisfied expression.

"But, professor, had you not better state your wishes to Miss Gripp or Mr. Gripp? Surely if they knew that their table was deficient in the article of—of spotted-mule, they would make good the deficiency."

"Ma'am," replied the teacher sadly, "I have spoken, but in vain. They say they never heard of it. I have offered to give them the recipe, I have offered to go down into the kitchen and make a spotted-mule myself, but they refuse. They say they do not think the boarders would like it. They say that Americans do not care for solid pudding; it is a libel on my countrymen. Great heavens! what is a dinner without pudding?"

And the professor put a fresh jujube between his lips, and went back sadly to his chair under the mantelpiece.

"*C'est le ventre qui gouverne le monde,*" said Nell to herself, quoting the words of Napoleon, "but I didn't expect to find a verification of that axiom in the case of a professor from Boston. What was your description of Boston, Mr. Claypole?"

"It is the hub, ma'am, of the universal earth," replied the young man from China, looking up for a moment from his diary.

"Ah, yes; thank you. And the professors of Boston," she said, lowering her voice, "represent, I suppose, the cream of the city's intellect?"

"There air professors and professors, ma'am, even in Bohston," was the sententious answer.

A new boarder arrived shortly before bed-time that evening. The sound of cab-wheels in the street was followed by a tremendous knocking at the door, which disturbed the boarders in their several occupations.

"A party from Amer'ca, I guess. Will you bet?" said Mr. Claypole to the company generally.

The knocking was repeated more loudly and emphatically. If the President himself had arrived, with seven cab-loads of trunks, and an imperative demand for the whole of the first floor, he could not have made more noise about it.

The boarders, who always welcomed a diversion after dinner, repaired in a body to the hall, whither Mr. Gripp had already preceded them.

The new arrival was apparently a very young and certainly a very small lady, whose naturally fresh complexion was just then a little heightened, owing to a pretty stiff altercation with the cabman.

"Say!" exclaimed the new arrival, turning indignantly to Mr. Gripp, "this driver don't know how to use me."

"I shall indite a chapter on drivers, ma'am, in a work I have in hand, which will be calc'lated to make every cabman in this metrop'lis squirm on his haunches," interposed Mr. Claypole, who seldom waited for an introduction.

The young lady calmed her ire, and proceeded to roll into the house a trunk like a miniature Noah's Ark, which, had it not been provided with small wheels at each corner, no two men could have moved. Having, with the assistance of Mr. Gripp and Claypole, got it up the steps and into the hall, she seated herself upon it, and rummaged in a shabby little reticule until she found a good-sized visiting card, which she handed to Mr. Gripp.

"I reckon this is Gripp's Anglo-Amer'can Boardin'-house," she said, surveying the company with the most perfect self-possession.

Mr. Gripp said it was, and that he was Gripp.

"Happy to make your acquaint'nce, sir. Is dinner through?" said the new-comer.

Mr. Gripp, not having his glasses with him, had handed the card to Mr. Claypole, who read therefrom:

"'*Miss Maggie M'Gee, Chicago, U.S.*'"

"My name and ad—dress, sir. Is dinner through?" she said again to Gripp.

Dinner *was* "through," of course, which meant also that there was very little remaining in the larder.

"But come in, come in," said Gripp in his genial way, ushering Miss M'Gee, with all the boarders behind her,

into the dining-room. "Come in, and I'll see what—hum! —we can get you. Teresa, my sister, is not very well this evening, and the cook, I believe, has—ha!—just stepped into Tottenham Court Road to see a relative. I say, to see a relative," repeated Mr. Gripp, looking round upon the company as if he expected a denial of that statement; for most of them knew pretty well where the cook went to when she started out at nine p.m. to "see a relative." But as no one opposed him, he turned again to Miss M'Gee, and said: "But what do you say to a piece of cold beefsteak?"

"Thank you, sir, if you'll be so good as fetch it out, I'll progress with it. When I'm hungry," added Miss M'Gee, addressing herself to the boarders generally, "I can put myself outside of 'most anything."

While the steak was being fetched, Mr. Gripp performed the ceremony of introduction, and when it came, Miss M'Gee waited to begin until she had called upon the professor for a benediction, which he pronounced with a somewhat injured air, as feeling that he ought not to be asked to bless a meal which he was not invited to share.

"Wall, ma'am, and what way did you leave things in our Free and Glorious Land?" inquired Mr. Claypole, when Miss M'Gee had begun to make play with her knife and fork.

"Amer'ca had not busted up, sir, when I came away," replied the young lady.

"I reckon not, ma'am. And the folk out there, bummin' around free and prosp'rous as usu'l?"

"If you'll be so good as wait until I've settled with this steak, sir," answered Miss M'Gee, "I'll tell you 'most anything you want to know;" and no other word did she speak while the steak held out.

Nell watched this quaint little Yankee with extraordinary interest. She looked barely sixteen, though she was very nearly twenty. She was small and wiry in person, and her features bore an unmistakable New England stamp. Her complexion was vivid, her teeth white as ivory, and perfectly regular, her eyes bright as crystals, and sharp as pins. Her coolness and self-possession were complete; she was self-assertive to a degree, but without a trace of vanity or affectation.

If Nell was attracted by the crisp Yankee style of Miss

M'Gee, that young lady on her part was at once interested in the handsome, clever-looking English girl, whose appearance and manner were entirely different from those of her fellow-boarders.

"You are not an Amer'can, ma'am, I think," she said to Nell, when the party had returned to the drawing-room.

"No; I fear I am altogether British," answered Nell.

"That is so, ma'am. I knew that right away. Our girls have smartness, and they have some style; but the English girls have a tone of their own which ours don't somehow seem to get."

"You are complimentary to us," laughed Nell. "But I won't let you underrate your own girls. You have ever so much more pluck and enterprise than we have."

"How so, ma'am?"

"Why, look at yourself. You have travelled from a far American city, and over the Atlantic to London, without a single protector."

"Why, cert'nly, ma'am!"

"Well, I can assure you there are very few English girls who would care to travel alone from London to Chicago."

"Why, the journey's of no account at all, ma'am. Cars to New York, boat to Liverpool, cars to London, cab to Gripp's Amer'can Boarding House. That's all, I reckon."

Nell laughed; the girl made nothing at all of the thousands of miles she had travelled, alone and unprotected, and at twenty years of age.

"By-and-by, ma'am, I shall run through France, It'ly, and Germany, and, maybe, step across to Egypt, and see those Pyramids."

"It will be a delightful tour."

"Yes, ma'am, I guess. But it's business more than pleasure with me. I'm here to improve; and when I've done improvin', I go right back home to Amer'ca."

"It will be a trip to remember all your life, I am sure."

"Yes, ma'am, it will so. And it will be useful to me in my career."

"You have a career, then?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am; when I've done all the improvin' I can, I mean to run for PRESIDENT."

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE BEHIND THE SCENES.

KEEPING a boarding-house of the style of Gripp's is pretty shifty work.

"What kind of a season is it going to be?" was the question which Mr. and Miss Gripp asked of one another before the Americans began to arrive; and, when they had arrived, "Are we likely to see the colour of all these people's money? Will the joint always go twice round at dinner? Can the cook be trusted not to get drunk and punch the housemaid's head oftener than once or twice in a fortnight?"

The uncertainties of an establishment like Gripp's were greater than those of the ordinary London boarding-house. Money might be tighter, or the Atlantic stormier than usual; from both or either of which circumstances it generally followed that the visitors to London were fewer. Neither were they permanent boarders when they came. The best season was from May to the end of August; before and after that time the profits were hardly worth the taking.

At Gripp's, as may have been gathered, the boarders were not generally of the wealthier class of Americans. No one, in fact, ever went to Gripp's who visited London for the purpose of "chucking a pile." Its patrons were students, travelling alone like Miss M'Gee, or in parties like the professor's young ladies, who came to England chiefly for the sake of "improvin'" themselves, and whose object as regarded money was not so much to spend as to save it. They were "ministers" in rather needy circumstances,

whose flock had subscribed the means for their holiday; people travelling for firms, minor politicians, and occasionally an actor or actress seeking a London engagement.

The Gripps made a friend of Nell, and took her into their confidence. A little partnership was formed, which seemed likely to be profitable to both sides. Nell was young and brisk, and full of energy; sister Gripp was elderly, ailing, and querulous; brother Gripp was strong enough and willing enough, but a quite unspeakably bad manager; his heart, as all the boarders said, was soft; but unhappily, "in all that was of practical" his head was soft likewise. How they made the boarding-house pay was a mystery, to themselves no less than to others. As a matter of fact, they did not, I believe, make it pay to any notable extent; they cleared a little when the season was a good one, they scarcely persuaded both ends to meet when it was a bad one.

The partnership was entered into on this wise. When Nell was introduced to Miss Gripp, which was not until she had been three days in the house, she saw a thin, puny woman, about fifty years of age, who still carried about her a few faded marks of gentility and refinement, but whose voice had rather a shrewish note, and who gave an impression of being but poorly able to tackle an obstreperous boarder. She lay on a sofa, with her head swathed in a damp towel, and a large assortment of medicine bottles at her elbow. She brightened, however, at Nell's approach: Nell was so strong, and brave, and sunny, that the weak woman on the sofa quickened at sight of her.

"It does one good only to look at you," she said, raising herself, and gazing admiringly on Nell. "What a figure you have, and what a splendid head! If I were an artist I would bribe you to sit to me, and to me only, every day. Will you lay your hand on my head a moment? Ah! I thought so; there is magnetism in your touch; you give me strength."

In a few minutes' talk, Nell knew a good deal about Miss Gripp. She saw in her a nervous invalid, whose weakness and long habit of dependence had made her selfish, exacting, and irritable. But she had a clear, cool head, and was not wanting in sympathy when the right spot was touched.

"This," she said—meaning the boarding-house—"is a very poor business, you know. We hardly live on it. My health is too bad to allow me to do much in the house, and as for my brother, he is no more able to manage it than a baby."

"He seems to work very hard in it, though," said Nell.

"Oh, yes, he does that; but my brother has not the head for it, you know—has not the head for it."

"If I can be of any help, you must tell me, please."

"Thank you; I have been thinking about it. I don't see why, if you are willing, you should not do something for me. I am often obliged to be away from the table; you could take my place there, as you have done already. The servants want more supervision than I can give them; you might manage that for me. I shall reduce your terms, you know, if that is any consideration."

"Thank you; it is a very important consideration."

So the bargain was struck.

"I don't fancy we shall keep on the house much longer," continued Miss Gripp. "I have put it in the hands of an agent, who is trying to dispose of my connection."

Nell did not fail to note Miss Gripp's frequent use of the possessive pronoun. She spoke invariably of "my" house, "my" furniture, "my" connection, "my" servants; and when she alluded to Gripp it was never as "Joe," or "brother," but always "my brother."

Joe did almost everything in the house, but Miss Gripp would not allow that he did anything.

"And when you have disposed of the boarding-house, Miss Gripp?" said Nell inquiringly.

"Oh, we must get along then as best we can. I have a kind of staff in addition to this. When I am well enough I do something in this way," and she took up from a table beside her two or three glass slides, containing each a delicate anatomical drawing.

"Oh, this is wonderful," exclaimed Nell, looking at one of the slides, on which was a small drawing of an eyeball, finished with minutest skill. "This is all your own work, Miss Gripp?"

"Yes; I do those for doctors. It is difficult work, but well paid, and I have hopes of extending my connection

sufficiently to enable me to live by them. My brother does a little in the same way, but his touch is not fine enough, not fine enough. If you could help me in this, now——"

"I have done some drawing, and—and a little modelling, but nothing so fine as this," said Nell.

"Drawing and modelling! Have you, indeed! That sounds well. Perhaps you may help me in this, too, after all. I like you," she said in a gentler tone; "I hope we shall please one another."

"I hope we shall," replied Nell cordially.

"I am afraid you will have to bear with me sometimes," said Miss Gripp, half laughing and half apologising. "But it is not quite my own fault when I am cross and grumble. You don't know, and I hope you never will know, what it is to have unmanageable nerves; but I believe I could put up with the nerves if it were not for rent, and taxes, and cooks, and tiresome boarders."

"Well," said Nell, laughing, "you must put some of your troubles on my shoulders; they haven't had much to bear yet, and I think they can carry a good deal."

"You are very kind, Miss Haffenden," answered the other, "but I shan't put more upon you than I can help."

There are people of whom it seems to be almost the *métier* to inspire confidence and warm feelings. They are blessed with a strength, either of mind or body, or both, which seems able to give of itself to others and weaker ones. They have sympathy more than they need for themselves; they have courage so much that they can part with a little of it to the less courageous; they have energy and hope in such full measure as to be able of their abundance to give unto others.

Nell was one of these well-dowered and generous natures. She took her place quickly in the midst of her new companions; and yet it was not so much that she took it as that they gave it to her. She was herself surprised to find how she was placed almost immediately on a level as good as that of the best of her associates. She remembered her simple homely life in the country, and wondered how it could be that these wide-awake Yankees, some of them with practical knowledge of two or three continents, and all of them boasting a far greater share of outward

experience than herself, were glad to talk to her as to an equal, to question and consult her.

But she wondered less when she thought of the wise old parson, who had been her friend and counsellor in those pleasant rustic days, now laid to rest; and remembered in how many things he had diligently schooled her. The experience which had been his he had given to her; and though it had been rather a scholarly than a worldly experience, the old Vicar had in his day rubbed shoulders with many men, and learned to know them; and Nell in her converse with him had imbibed more than a merely bookish lore.

Having settled that practical matter with Miss Gripp, Nell felt a good deal more at her ease. She had a fixed position in the house, and, better still, she saw that she would now be able to eke out her little fortune much further than she could otherwise have hoped to do. Moreover, she might take leisurely counsel with herself about the future, for she did not forget the purpose she had set before her in coming to London. She had come there to try her strength, to prove what a girl might do in the big world where men and women strove together for daily bread, and, having won that, for fame; and where the race is, if not to the swiftest, most assuredly always to the strongest.

Already she began to perceive the difficulties that she would have to meet. They were all workers at the boarding-house, and most of them were girls, and the talk turned often upon their chances and possibilities in the world. Most of them wanted Nell to try her fortune in their own country—free, limitless America—where they said her opportunities would be a hundred-fold better than in the old land.

"I don't see that you can do a great deal here, ma'am, any way. There don't seem to be much of a career for our sex in England," said Miss M'Gee.

"But what better career is open to us in America?" asked Nell in reply. "What could I hope to be in America that I may not hope to be in England?"

"Why, ma'am, you might be President—after me. Now, push and worry as you may, I guess you can't be Queen of England?"

"No; but then, you see, I haven't any ambition to be either President of America or Queen of England."

"Well, ma'am, I allow that makes a difference."

Only to one of her fellow-boarders had Nell confided her dearest hopes. To Mary Meadows, the art student, she had whispered her longing to be an artist. To Mary she had shown her sketches and her models, and from Mary she received the strongest encouragement.

"You ought not to hesitate; this is your true calling," was what Mary had said.

"But think of all that I have missed in the way of training and practice which I ought to have gone through by this time," answered Nell.

"That's nothing; just nothing at all," said Mary, "Why, Miss Haffenden, you've done your schooling alone. You've said some nice things about my bits of work that I've shown you, but I tell you that I couldn't draw like that after I'd been right through the best school in America; and as for modelling—well, I never could model. But you—you've never set foot in an art school in your life, you've never had a teacher, and you've done work that the best-taught pupil in England or America might be proud of."

This was warm encouragement, and it was what Nell needed. She had willingness and courage unbounded; but in this thing that lay nearest to her heart she mistrusted herself, having never yet been fairly proved.

Before long she found another hearty ally and counsellor in old Joe Gripp. Nell and Joe became great friends. There was something at once anomalous and forlorn in his position in the house. He was there only for the sake of his sister, who nevertheless insisted that the gain was all on his side, inasmuch as he had board and lodging without paying for it. But Nell soon perceived that whether the management of the concern were good or bad, it would be very much worse without Joe. What he lacked in hard-headedness, and other qualities necessary to the profitable working of a boarding-house, he made up in assiduity and a tireless devotion to his sister's interests. Joe hated the business, root and branch. Nevertheless, he did all the drudgery and all the dirty work without a murmur. He took all the kicks, and the half-pence were not worth mentioning.

If a boarder were to be tackled for arrears of payment, it was Joe who had to do it. Once, and once only, did he

become recalcitrant in a case of this kind. The defaulter was a girl, who could not pay her bill through a delay in the arrival of remittances. She was with a party under the care of a professor, and they were on the point of starting for Paris. Miss Gripp, from the safe retreat of her bedroom, said the girl should not go until her account was settled, and bid Joe carry the message. It was the only occasion on which Joe was known to swear in the presence of a lady. He replied:

"You may take that message yourself, Teresa. I'll be d—d if I do."

The girl was allowed to go with her party, and the remittances from New York arrived the next morning.

If the mutton or the pudding ran short at dinner (the appetites of the professor and Miss M'Gee were appalling) it was Joe who had to extemporise a plausible fiction concerning that auxiliary dish which had come to grief in the cooking.

He got up at six in the morning—though nowise indisposed to a little more "folding of the hands"—and cleaned the boots of the whole establishment. He did all the marketing, and as the tradesmen of the Tottenham Court Road seemed to swindle him on a general and systematic principle, he generally got the worst of everything, and paid for the best. If not provided with a list overnight, he forgot the most of his purchases, and it was no uncommon thing to see him clap on his funny little wideawake and whisk out a few minutes before breakfast, returning presently with half a dozen herrings in one pocket, and a pound of butter in the other.

Nell almost loved Joe for the patient good-humour with which he got him through his daily round of unloved duties.

In a quiet, unobtrusive way, she relieved him of one little burden or another, and from the day that she announced to him her intention to do the marketing he fairly worshipped her.

It was a department which she undertook not without misgiving, for she was no genius at a bargain, and the ladies and gentlemen who stood behind the counters in the London shops had seemed to her to be persons of such a very exalted station.

However, she got on very well, for when Nell, with her graceful figure and that fine pose of the head, showed herself in a shop, the gentleman in charge perceived instinctively that here was either a duchess or a prima-donna of the opera, who had taken a freak to do her own purchasing, and no more dreamt of giving her short measure or light weight than he would have dreamed of doing anything else in the case of an ordinary customer.

The shopmen felt themselves honoured by her patronage; and as for Joe, he was eternally grateful.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE PRESENCE OF DIANA.

"WELL, suppose we go to the British Museum?" said Nell.

"Yes, ma'am, cert'nly; but I thought you'd been there?" answered Miss M'Gee.

"Oh, so I have; but you know it's ever such a big place, and I—I haven't seen all of it yet."

"Let's go right away, then; for I've got to see all there is in that Museum before I start back home. First thing pap's going to say to me when I show up again in Chicago is, 'Sit right down, Maggie, and tell me about Queen Victoria, the Tabernacle, and the British Museum.'"

"Then it won't do to miss the Museum, evidently."

"Not by any means, ma'am. You can't dodge pap on that, for he knows the guide-book by heart."

So they started for the Museum. It was about a week since Nell's first visit, and she was, I am sure, extremely anxious to see the goddess again. To-day there was no prospect of rain, at which, doubtless, Nell was pleased; for it may be remembered that, on the occasion of her first visit, there fell a little summer shower, which delayed her some time on the steps of the Museum. William, the policeman, abode still by the gate, and the pigeons fluttered as before over the broad gray walk.

"We don't want any flunk with a wand to put us through, I guess," said Miss M'Gee, eyeing the attendant in livery with a somewhat defiant gaze.

"Oh, no, it will be ever so much nicer by ourselves; and besides, I've been through the best of the rooms and know the way."

"Then parties with wands had better leave us clear," said Miss M'Gee.

Nell asked where they should make a beginning, and Miss M'Gee replied:

"I think, ma'am, we'll just skip through Egypt and Assyria; pap's great on both of 'em, and if I don't pass muster when he gets to quest'ning me there, he'll reckon the passage-money just wasted."

So Nell took her companion through the galleries, where are heaped the marvellous monuments of ages that were old before the Christian era dawned; and when they had seen them thoroughly, Miss M'Gee shut up her note-book with a snap, gave a little whistle of relief, and said:

"Thank you, ma'am; I expect that will do. If pap gets the bulge on me now, I'll change places with our hired help."

"And now," said Nell, "you shall come and see my goddess." The Bronze Room was deserted, but the restful beauty of the goddess seemed to fill it.

The two girls gazed long upon the head and countenance where loveliness divine, and majesty supreme, and tenderness infinite are wrought by the cunning of a hand which the brain of a worshipping believer must have guided. Nell's thoughts, as she looked, were away in the Greece of old; she could see the shining temple, with the sun gilding its marbles, and the throng of willing worshippers; and could hear the shouts as they bore their gifts to lay upon the shrine.

Her companion, too, seemed scarcely less moved.

"What do you think?" said Nell. "Is she not divine?"

"Ma'am," replied Miss M'Gee, "when I look on that face I feel kind of homesick. It's the real livin' image of my Aunt Lavinia."

Before Nell had quite got over the shock, she was conscious of a small inward flutter, and a gathering rosiness in her cheeks, for she saw her unknown knight at the other end of the room—he, I mean, of the fair hair and lazy eyes.

How he came to be there it is perhaps not worth while to inquire. In matters of this kind there is no accounting for sudden appearances.

He drew near; he lifted his hat, and as he did so, Nell could not but observe that he had a finely-shaped and characteristic hand. There is much distinction in the hand. In its way, it is as expressive as the forehead, the eyes, the beard, or the mouth. D'Arpentigny divided men into the two classes of smooth-fingered and knotty-fingered; in the former he placed the artists, in the latter the mathematicians, the men of science, and the practical men. The hand of the unknown was of moderate size, and symmetrical; the fingers long, smooth, and conical. This takes long to write, but a moment to observe.

He lifted his hat, and said to Nell:

"You have come to see your goddess again?"

"Yes," replied Nell.

"So have I," said the knight; and withal, like Demas, he blushed as he spoke; for I fear that this was not the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Said Miss M'Gee to herself: "I reckon that there are times when two's company and three isn't." To Nell she said: "I feel just about hungry, ma'am. If you would be so kind as tell me where there's any buns, I'd be obliged."

The knight with alacrity pointed the way to the refreshment room, and Miss M'Gee thanked him; and saying to Nell: "Don't you be in any trouble about me, ma'am; I'll prospect for the bun department, and when I'm ready, I can push out by myself," went off in search of buns.

"It's a vile place," said the knight apologetically to Nell, when she had gone. "The buns are like the Assyrian remains—'age unknown.'"

"I have no fear for Miss M'Gee; she has a very healthy appetite," replied Nell.

It did not appear to her to be a very strange, or at all an improper thing, that she should be talking in this way with a handsome young man whose name she did not know, and whom she had met only once before in her life. Her notions of right and wrong, in all matters, were of a beautiful, primitive simplicity; and on the subject of conventional propriety she had no notions whatever. It was enough for her that she had found her companion interesting and pleasant at their first meeting, and that her woman's instinct told her he was a gentleman. She was glad to meet him a second time. There was a genial

atmosphere about him; he looked so good-natured, so determined to please and to be pleased. The very indolence which marked his general manner, and was suggested in the tone of his voice, had a natural flavour, and was in its way entertaining.

"And are you as much in love with the goddess as ever?" he asked.

"More, much more: if I had lived in old Greece I could willingly have worshipped such a face as this."

"Do you take her to be a Venus or an Artemis?"

"Not a Venus, certainly. There is no suggestion of Venus."

"No, I think you are right. Tell me," he continued, "with what feeling do you think that you would look upon this head if you were a sculptor?"

"With a reverent feeling, I am sure, for I should know that I stood before the work of a master. How would *you* feel if you looked on it as a sculptor?"

"Well, looking on it as a sculptor, I feel particularly small."

"*Are* you a sculptor?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how delightful! No, I mean—yes, that *is* what I mean. I have never seen a sculptor before."

"You see a very inconsiderable one now, I can assure you."

"Oh, that does not matter in the least. And you are a real sculptor, and work with a chisel?"

"Yes, and in an apron; you should see me in my apron."

"You cannot think how interested I am;" and Nell, in her young enthusiasm, and hardly knowing what she did, put out her hand, which the sculptor took and held, unblushingly.

"But tell me," she said, "why should you feel 'small'?"

"Because I feel the dead to be so immeasurably my master."

"That is a very good feeling, only you should not allow it to discourage you."

"But it does discourage me. If I lived a thousand years I could not better, probably could never equal, the

work of this unknown sculptor, who lived before our era was born."

"Yes, but the greatness of his work should incite, not deter you."

"Have you travelled?"

"Only from my own village to London."

"Ah! That is not a great way, I dare say. I have been wherever there is fine sculpture to be seen; and having seen it, I often wonder at my own boldness in calling myself a sculptor."

"I can't agree with you one bit: the nobler the work you see, the higher the inspiration you should draw from it."

"But if you had seen and known that nothing greater can be done than has been done already—done more than two thousand years ago? No one that lives or is to live can go beyond the Zeus of Pheidias, the Borghese Achilles, the Apollo Belvedere, the Venus of the Capitol, the Laocoön, or the Dying Gladiator."

"But what you say does not touch my position in the least. Suppose Michael Angelo, or Canova, or Thorwaldsen, or Flaxman, had said what you say, and had given themselves up to despairing worship, instead of to imitating and creating anew. Surely we should have lost something which, since we have got it, is well worth the keeping? Come, allow that I have beaten you."

"You reason well," laughed the sculptor.

"What you say," went on Nell, "a poet might have said when Shakespeare died."

"Then you would not have us cry with Othello, that our occupation's gone?"

"I should think you would be quite unworthy your profession if you did."

"But you will allow, for I'm sure you have a fair mind, that our sources of inspiration are not those of the sculptors of old Greece?"

"No, in that I think they had the advantage; our life is not what theirs was."

"Indeed, no. And think what a life that was: free to the clear air and the sun, full of the gladdest festivals; of music and of song. Think of their theatre, where to-day they had the grandest tragedy, and to-morrow the wittiest

comedy. Think of their games, where the sculptor saw the young men whose bodies were perfect in their strength and beauty. Think of their religion, always picturesque, and, in its best forms, full of the loveliness and purity of art. Imagine the ideas that must have come in the mind of a devout Greek when he thought of Zeus, of Artemis, of Apollo."

"But our religion is more beautiful than theirs."

"Perhaps; but it certainly has not the same adaptability to the art of the sculptor. Paganism had its share of the sensuous and the sensual, but few of the terrors of Christianity."

"Yet the Greeks had their furies and their harpies," said Nell.

"But neither the furies nor the harpies found much place in sculpture," he answered.

"But what I think is this," said Nell; "that though our life is very different from the Greek, and has perhaps not a great deal of the spirit of art; yet every age, old or new, provides its own work for the artist."

"That is a good saying," replied the sculptor; and then, changing his tone, added, with a queer mixture of earnestness and banter, "almost you persuade me to be ambitious."

"Do not make fun of me," said Nell. "Almost persuade you! And are you not ambitious already? I think that ambition should be the breath of every artist. I can imagine no true artist without ambition."

"From this day," replied the sculptor, "my ambition shall know no bounds. But having given me ambition, you must now give my ambition an object."

"Make London beautiful!" said Nell.

"Ha, that's an object indeed! But the task is Herculean. Life, as the poets and the registrar tell us, is brief, and London contains two hundred and fifty square miles of ugliness."

"But I suppose there are a good many artists in London, and one of you at least might make a beginning."

"So you are disenchanted with it already?" he replied, parrying her thrust.

"Oh, no; not in the least. But my eyes tell me that London is by no means the beautiful place it might be,

if the artist chose to try and beautify it. The streets are monotonous; there are no statues, no trees; there is too much sameness everywhere."

"But tell me," said the young man, "are you not an artist yourself?"

"No," replied Nell, "I wish I were!"

"You seem as if you should be one," said he.

"It is what I have longed to be," she answered.

"At any rate, art is a familiar subject to you. You know its history better than I do, I am sure. Have you never drawn or modelled?"

"I have done a little of both—of modelling more than of drawing; but in a very blind way, with no one to guide me."

"I should like to see what you have done."

"I am not at all proud of it, and I don't think I should like to show it to you."

"Oh, but I want you to—to help me in beautifying London, you know."

Nell laughed, but the sculptor looked as solemn as it was possible for him to look.

She did not answer, and neither spoke for a minute. Then the sculptor said:

"Will you not tell me your name?"

"I do not see why I should not," she answered. "I am called Nell Haffenden."

"I am called Horace Monteith. Now we know each other."

"Perhaps. You have a great many friends, I dare say?"

"I know a good many people. And you?"

"I have not many friends anywhere; and in London, none at all."

"Then let us be friends. Do you agree?"

"I think perhaps I should like it."

There existed once upon a time an excellent pious custom of ratifying new-made friendships with a kiss. It is unhappily extinct, like many other excellent pious customs. It is not improbable that the sculptor would have liked to revive that custom, but I think he was a little afraid of Nell, who, in spite of her innocence touching most of the proprieties and conventionalities, had a distinct

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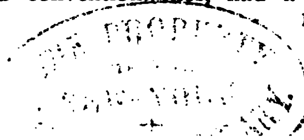


notion of the respect that was owing by a youth to a maiden. So the sculptor had to be content with a touch of fingers. From the moment of that second touch of hands their footing had changed, their relations were changed, they were strangers no more, they had sealed their bond of friendship.

It was of friendship only that Nell was thinking. She had found a companion, a very handsome and pleasant companion certainly; but nothing more. Until now she had seen no one in the least like this young sculptor. He was something more than a new experience to her; he was an artist. All her life long she had been dreaming about artists, envying them, wondering of what kind they were, whether they looked like the people who did ordinary humdrum work, wondering how they talked and how they worked, and what were their feelings when the world applauded them, and called them great. And here she was face to face with a real living artist, and more than that, she had spoken with him. He had told her that he worked with a chisel and in an apron; she had shaken hands with him, and they had promised to be friends. She felt a little flutter of pride to think that she had "made friends" with a handsome and distinguished sculptor—handsome he was beyond question—and she was sure that, in spite of his own disclaimer, he must be distinguished. Moreover, he realised her ideal as to the personal appearance of an artist. He did not look a bit like the other people. He did not wear a black coat, or a stiff collar, or a tall glossy hat. His clothes were a tweed suit of a light brownish colour, fitting well but easily; his collar was wide and loose, displaying the neck; and for scarf he had a brown silk neckerchief, knotted carelessly at the throat. His hat was a brown felt, with a brim of comfortable but not extravagant width.

As they stood together they made a striking and rather fascinating contrast.

Nell's carriage was more erect, her manner altogether firmer and more decisive; her eyes had more fire; the dreamy *insouciance* which marked the expression and whole attitude of the sculptor, was notably absent from her face and bearing. Nevertheless, they looked well together—they agreed, but it was with a difference; each seemed in some way to be the complement of the other.

They had passed out from the Museum, and through the gate, and were standing for a moment on the pavement. It is not a romantic spot in which to bid good-bye. The roar of Oxford Street is borne in through the side lanes, and there is a continuous thin stream of persons passing in and out of the Museum, and sentiment, if there existed any between those two young people, must have been effectually dispelled by the sudden reappearance of Miss M'Gee, who came tripping along from the Museum, humming "Yankee Doodle" just loud enough to let the Britons in her neighbourhood catch the air, and whisking particles of bun from her cloak.

"Now I shall have to hand you over to Miss M'Gee," said the sculptor, with reluctance in his voice and eyes.

"Yes," said Nell; "but——"

"But we shall meet again?"

"I hope so."

"And soon?"

"I hope so."

"Good-bye, then, for a while."

"Good-bye."

"I hope you found the refreshment room," said the sculptor, lifting his hat to Miss M'Gee.

"Oh, yes, sir, thank you."

"And you have had a bun?"

"Yes, sir; I've had four."

CHAPTER X.

CONFERENCE.

NELL was now more than ever bent on getting to work. She took her friend and ally, Joe, into her confidence. Nell always felt much more at home with Joe than with his sister. There was nothing superior about Joe; he was friendly, familiar, sympathetic, and had the knack of giving counsel without seeming either to dictate or to patronise.

Nell sought him in the little underground den which was his sanctum and workshop. Here he was generally to be found at odd moments of the day between breakfast and dinner; he took refuge here from the professional tedium which made up the greater part of his existence. Joe was a man of finer parts than one would have imagined who had known him only in his commoner capacity of drudge to his sister. Before he took pity on the sicknesses and weaknesses of Teresa, and joined partnership in the Keppel Street boarding-house, he had wandered about the world in one capacity and another, and turned his hand to a variety of trades which, if they had not lined his pockets, had given him a good deal of more or less useful knowledge about men and things. Among other trades he had practised in his youthful days was that of playwright; and there was a time when the success of certain old-fashioned farces and melodramas had led him to think that he was destined to blossom as the Shakespeare of the rising generation. But failing to get beyond the transpontine playhouses, he had outlived aspirations of that sort; and when the manager of a popular burlesque theatre, to whom in mistake he had submitted a tragedy in five acts, returned

it saying that he appreciated the joke, Joe laughed for the best part of a day, and wrote no more plays.

In regard to Nell, he was altogether enthusiastic. He believed in her, and was never tired of telling her that she must not waste too much of her energies in playing deputy-lieutenant in the boarding-house.

"Teresa and I have had our day," he used to say, "and we must make shift now with anything that turns up. As for me, I'm an old ne'er-do-well, and deserve no better work than haggling for red herrings and butter for breakfast. Teresa's a woman of mind, and would have made her mark if she'd had the chance; but we're both far gone in the sere and yellow now, and must do the best we can. But you—you're young, and you have brains and pluck, and must do something better."

This was the burden of the sermon which Joe was never weary of preaching at Nell, and which she on her part was not weary of listening to.

On the morning after the meeting related in the last chapter, she went downstairs to Joe's dungeon, and knocked at the door.

Joe was dividing his energies between the mending of a chair and the painting of a medical slide.

"Hum!" said Joe, "it's a first-rate thing to have two jobs going at once, one for the mind and the other for the muscles; besides, when I'm hammering at the chair one minute and using the brush the next minute, it's as if there were two of us at work together, and that's sociable, you know."

"But I should have thought that hammering at the chair made your hand unsteady for the brush," remarked Nell.

"Eh? Well, I never looked at it in that way. There's something in what you say, though; but you see, I never could handle the brush like Teresa, so she does the finer work, and I just rough in the coarser parts. Teresa's is the master-mind, you know. Ah! if Teresa only had her chance."

"And if you had had yours?"

"I! Bless you, I've run through a mint of chances! You wouldn't believe the chances I've wasted. Ask Teresa. But what have you got in your arms? You haven't been buying plaster-of-Paris statuary, have you?"

"No; not buying it."

"You don't mean that you've been making it?"

"I've been trying to. I want to ask your advice, if you will be so kind as to give it me. Are these of any value? I mean, are they good enough to make it worth while trying something better?"

"Let me see; I ought to know something about sculpture, my great-grandfather was a stonemason. This is good, I should say."

He took up and turned over a small statuette of a faun. It was a clever and spirited little sketch; suggested, doubtless, by some wood-cut in a dictionary of Grecian antiquities, which Nell had borrowed from the Vicar's library. The character of the creature, half man, half brute, was skilfully indicated in the narrow, sloping forehead, the small oblique eyes, the large pointed ears, the sensual mouth, and the rude animal strength of the body.

"This is first-rate," said Joe warmly. "I speak as a layman, and not as one of the gifted, you know; but I don't hesitate to call this first-rate. Who taught you?"

"No one," said Nell.

"God bless me!" replied Joe.

"And do you really think that I ought to go on?" asked Nell anxiously.

"Go on! I should think so. It would be a slighting of Providence if you didn't. Let us go and talk to Teresa; she is a woman of a very fine judgment."

Teresa was never in the most genial mood after breakfast. It was the hour which she usually devoted to experiments with new medicines. There had been a time when Joe did the preliminary tasting of her drugs, but after an accident not unlike that which befell Don Quixote's squire in his trial of the healing balsam, he had finally relinquished that office.

"Teresa—hum—now, Teresa," began Joe, in the nervous, awkward style in which he generally addressed his sister, "here is—eh?—we have got here—ha!—we should, I say, Teresa, much value your opinion on these little products—models would be better, perhaps—which Miss Hawthornden has submitted for—h'm—inspection."

"How you do splutter there like a great schoolboy," exclaimed Miss Gripp, whose incisive manner was a

beautiful contrast to the hesitation of her brother. "Put the things down—no, not there; can't you see the medicine bottle? And please don't shift about in that way; you're like a badly-jointed doll."

"Teresa is very penetrating," observed Joe in an undertone of mixed deprecation and admiration. "But, Teresa, now, what is your opinion of these little works? I say your opinion, Teresa?"

"Why, of this there can be but one opinion," replied Miss Gripp, taking the faun out of her brother's hands, and looking at it with genuine pleasure and surprise. "It is exceedingly clever. *You* could tell that, Joseph, I should think."

"It was—hum—it was my own opinion, Teresa," answered Joe meekly.

"You are both very kind indeed," said Nell. "You encourage me ever so much. And do you really think I ought to persevere?"

"Do I think so?" exclaimed Miss Gripp, appropriating the question to herself. "Why, of course I do. Joseph could have given you that much advice."

"Ha! I did venture that far, Teresa," said her brother.

"But how am I to begin here in London? I have not the least idea how to make a start," said Nell.

"You shall work here, here in this house," said Joe, who spoke with unwonted energy and directness whenever he addressed himself to Nell. "I will give you my room for a studio. You shall work your way up to fame alone and unassisted. You shall send your models to the Academy, and by-and-by the world will——"

"Hold your tongue, Joseph," said his sister. "I will not permit you to talk such nonsense. Listen to me, Miss Haffenden. My brother is absolutely ignorant of these matters. Your proper plan is to obtain admission to some sculptor's studio. Don't you know any sculptor in London?"

"No," said Nell, and then remembering, corrected herself with a blush. "At least I have met a sculptor, but I—I do not know where any sculptor lives."

"Then your only plan is to go round the studios. You must carry your models with you and show them, and ask to be taken as an assistant."

"Is that the way?" said Nell, with rather a scared expression.

"That is the way, my dear," replied Miss Gripp.

"Yes, Teresa is right; that is your plan," said Joe. "But don't be afraid; you won't have any difficulty, I'm sure. Any artist must see that there is merit in these, and they will all want to help you at once."

Nell and Miss Gripp laughed; Joe was so sublimely confident of the genius of his young friend, and convinced that everybody else would be as ready and willing to recognise it.

"I'm afraid it won't be as easy as all that," said Nell; "but I shan't mind a few failures to begin with."

"That's a good girl—hum!—I beg your pardon; I mean that's the—the proper spirit," said Joe. "But couldn't you get Miss Meadows to give you some introductions? She knows ever so many artists."

"I would rather first try by myself, I think, and see what kind of a reception I get."

"And so you shall," said Miss Gripp. "Miss Meadows will tell you where you ought to go, and you shall be your own pioneer."

"You might make a bust of Teresa to begin with," observed Joe. "I say, the head of Teresa—Teresa's head would model splendidly."

"I think, Joseph, you had better go downstairs," said Miss Gripp.

CHAPTER XI.

NELL TRIES THE STUDIOS.

NELL set out one fine morning to try her luck amongst the studios, with her models in a satchel by her side, and her heart in her boots.

While she had only to face it in thought it seemed an easy thing enough to do; but now that the task was actually in hand it seemed a good deal more formidable.

How would she be received? What should she say? She half wished she were back again in the country, and more than half wished that she had that new-found friend with the slender moustache to support her.

She wondered whether she looked as frightened as she felt, whether the people in the street knew what she was bent on, and whether any of them were going out for the first time to try their fortune in the world. She felt a new interest in every one of the hundreds of people she passed, and looked curiously into their faces to try and read their business and their thoughts. It is an odd thing to think of, that every day in every crowded street of London there must be people like Nell, who are just setting out on their journey through the world, with the same hopes, fears, and aspirations.

She was glad to notice that all the other people seemed so intent on their own affairs that they never troubled themselves to look at her.

She had to make her way from Oxford Street to the Fulham Road. She was going to the Avenue, and had been furnished by her American friend with the names of two or three celebrities on whom she was to call.

By this time she was beginning to be a little familiar with the wonderful streets, for she had made many pilgrimages eastward and westward from Keppel Street. Out of Regent Street she turned into Piccadilly, but hastened on to the Park, which she liked better, sparkling in its early beauty, with the wide green spaces, the shadows under the trees, and the distant glimpse of the lake.

The entrance to the Avenue is an archway in the Fulham Road, and the Avenue itself is a retired quiet little spot, with a row of shady elms bordering the flagged path before the studios. There is a large central doorway leading into a stone corridor of considerable length, on either side of which are doors, most of them containing the name of some sculptor or painter.

When Nell stood in the corridor and looked up and down the length of it, and listened to the sounds of hammer and chisel on either side, she grew so nervous that when she paused before one of the doors she fancied she could hear the beating of her heart.

On each side of the door at the entrance to the corridor was a plaster cast of a tiger, and these ferocious beasts glared on her like the veritable tigers that guarded the portals of the magician's palace. After standing there for two or three minutes, listening to the continuous chip, chip, of the chisels, she found herself growing more and more frightened, and at length her nervous fears so completely overcame her, that she turned away and went down the corridor again, and out into the Avenue.

She was more than half resolved to abandon the task before she had well begun it. But this she could not possibly do.

"Oh, you miserable coward!" she said to herself, and forced her steps into the corridor again, and went in a great hurry and pulled the bell at the first door. She had pulled two or three times before she found that the wire was broken, and then she rapped on the door with her knuckles. But this summons, like the first, went unanswered; and despairing of being heard at all, she took the faun out of the satchel, and banged his head against the panels of the door.

Half a minute later the door was opened, and a small gray-bearded man, with a rather rough head, and the stains

of wet clay on his hands, stood before her, and looked his visitor up and down with a not unkindly air.

"N—no, not to-day, I'm afraid. But why didn't you come last week? I engaged one three days ago, and her figure isn't half as good as yours," said the sculptor, with a sort of good-humoured annoyance.

"I—I beg your pardon," said Nell. "I came to ask if you wanted an—an assistant."

"An assistant? Oh my! I took you for a model. Why aren't you a model?"

Nell felt very much like blushing, but the tone of the sculptor was entirely inoffensive, and he was evidently speaking from a purely professional point of view.

"I'm not a model," she answered, "because—because I'm not; and shouldn't like to be. I want to be a sculptor."

The little gray eyes of the sculptor twinkled, and he began to smile.

"No use," he said. "No use, I'm afraid. Scarcely the profession for a lady, you know."

"But there are women sculptors, are there not?" said Nell.

"Eh? Well now, upon my word, I believe there are—one or two; but they ought to be something else, you know; they really ought;" and the features of the sculptor took a thoughtful shape, as though he were mentally devising some more suitable employment for the "one or two" ladies who had had the temerity to engage in sculpture.

"There are small things you might do very well—little busts, now, and things of that sort," he went on; "but when you came to the heroic, the mere details would floor you—they would, upon my honour. Look! you couldn't do that kind of thing, you know;" and turning about he pointed through another door to the studio beyond, where an assistant, wrapped from his neck to his feet in a canvas apron, was kneading, elbow-deep, an enormous mass of wet clay.

"Oh, yes, I could," said Nell, "if I wore an apron like that."

"You couldn't, you couldn't, indeed," urged the sculptor politely. "It's worse than the treadmill; and you'd make yourself in a fearful mess."

"Just let me try," laughed Nell. "I don't believe it's a bit worse than making bread, and I've done that often."

"It would kill you in an hour," replied the sculptor; and he said it in such a solemn air that Nell laughed again.

"Well, any way," persisted the sculptor, "you couldn't do that," and he turned about again, and pointed to a man perched on the top of a high ladder, who was "pointing" the head of a colossal statue.

"You couldn't manage the ladder," he said triumphantly.

"But I could," answered Nell. "I've climbed trees much higher than that."

"To climb a tree, my dear young lady, is one thing; to run up and down ladders in my studio would be quite another thing. Why, I have a dozen young men working here. It would not do at all. No, you really must not think of it."

"You will not take me, then?" said Nell.

"I'm afraid I must decline. And after all, you know, it really is not a lucrative profession. England is not the place for a sculptor. Little work, small pay, and no appreciation. You should go to France or Italy."

Nell could not but think that the spectacle of the twenty assistants hard at work in two or three good-sized rooms, and other evidences which the studio offered of a busy and prosperous profession, were, to say the least, at variance with this statement, but she said nothing.

"Think the matter over again," said the sculptor. "Think about my first suggestion—the model, you know. A first-rate profession that, nice easy work, and pretty good pay. I shall be putting a Venus in hand in a month; come and see me then. Good morning, and thank you very much for your visit." And the sculptor bowed, and the door was closed.

Nell knocked at the next door.

A very small boy, with such very dirty hands and face that Nell wondered whether he were sitting as model for a cherubic chimney-sweep, answered her knock, and without any hesitation asked her to walk in, and ushered her into a diminutive antechamber. He left her there, and went back to the studio; and Nell heard him say:

"Please, sir, I think it's a model."

"Oh, no, it isn't," said Nell to herself, determined to forestall anything this sculptor might have to say on that point.

Then the sculptor came in—a young man, apparently of seven or eight-and-twenty, well looking, and dressed in a loose, gray jacket.

"I am not a model, please," began Nell at once. "I want to begin work as a sculptor, and am seeking to engage myself as an assistant, or to be taken as a pupil."

"I do not take pupils," replied the sculptor kindly, "and I have an assistant already."

"Thank you," said Nell rising; "then I must not trouble you further."

"I should like to be of assistance to you," said the sculptor. "But I know of very few sculptors who take pupils, and—if you will pardon my saying so—I do not know one who has a lady assistant."

"I am afraid ladies are looked upon as intruders in your profession," said Nell, with a smile.

"I—I hope not. I have never considered them as such. Have you had any experience?"

"No, not in a professional sense," she answered.

"You have been through the schools, I suppose?"

"No."

"Have you studied abroad—in Berlin, or——"

"No," answered Nell; "I—I have not had any training."

"You are quite a beginner?"

"Yes. I have done these," and she held out timidly the faun and his two companions.

"These are very clever," he said, taking them from her and looking them thoroughly over. "The modelling here," pointing to the faun, "is not perfect. You have got this arm a little wrong; but I would never have believed that such work could come from an untaught hand. You must go on."

"But how," laughed Nell, "if no one will have anything to say to me?"

"I was in your position once," he replied. "I worked for five years alone, in my own room, without help or friends. No one would take me into his studio, no one would buy my work. I sold my first bust when I was almost a beggar,

and then the tide turned and carried me, though very slowly, to success. But I don't think that you will have to go through my experience. Your work is far better than mine was at that day. If you will allow me, I will think over the matter for you; and if you will leave your address with me, I will communicate with you should I find that I can do anything. Stay, though, have you called on Græme? He has the studio next to this."

"Oh, yes, I have been there," said Nell. "He says a lady ought not to be a sculptor, because she could not knead clay, and ought not to climb a ladder."

The sculptor laughed. "There is something in what Græme says, though it sounds funny," he replied. "But I don't think *you* are to be daunted by such obstacles as these. Thank you," he said, as Nell pencilled her address on a scrap of paper, and handed it to him. "I am not, of course, able to make any promise; I can only say that I hope you may hear from me. In any case, if I may venture to say so, I should like you to call on me again. Good-bye."

Strange to say, the kindness of the second sculptor had a more depressing effect on Nell than the brusque depreciation of the first. She felt that she should have been brightened, but for some reason which she could not explain, his very sympathy and gentleness contributed to undermine her courage.

"It really does seem rather hopeless," she said. "One sculptor won't take me because he has too many assistants, and another declines because he has only one. But I'm going to try once more, anyhow."

The third name on her list had been marked by Miss Meadows as "doubtful."

"I wouldn't call on him," Miss Meadows had said, "unless the others fail. I only put him down because they say he's in society, and knows a lot of grand people, and might be of some use that way."

The name on the paper was Augustus Slingfield, and Nell remembered to have noticed it on one of the doors. She walked down the corridor, until she came to a door on which was an immense brass plate, containing the name of Mr. Augustus Slingfield in letters that were nearly all flourish and curve.

There was something so imposing about the plate, the

name, and the flourishes, that Nell hesitated whether to knock or go away.

"After all, he can't do more than snub me," she thought, and rapped on the door with an elaborate carved knocker.

It was opened almost instantaneously, and the first thing Nell saw was a head ducking down before her with an immense quantity of hair, frizzed, curled, and parted precisely in the centre.

The head was bowing very low, so that Nell looked right down upon it, and the owner of the head, without lifting himself, said in a tone of suave humility:

"Walk in, your grace, pray walk in."

"I am not her grace," said Nell, and the head shot up with exceeding celerity.

"Eh?—oh! pardon me; I thought you were the—ah —the duchess. I was expecting her grace to call about this time. A model, my dear?"—and Mr. Augustus Slingfield, for this was he, adjusted an eyeglass (he used it for models only), and surveyed Nell with an air of genial condescension.

"No," replied Nell, wishing herself anywhere else, "I am not a model. I——"

"Ah, you wish to see my works. Pray come in. I should apologise for my working costume, but we sculptors, you know, must not mind being seen in the garb of labour."

It did not fail to strike Nell that Mr. Slingfield's garb of labour was very unlike that of either of the sculptors with whom she had just been speaking. He wore a handsome black velvet coat, and the waistcoat, of the same material, was adorned with a gold watch-chain and seals. Neither his dress nor his hands bore marks of the clay which stained the persons of Mr. Græme and his brother artist, and Nell had a shrewd suspicion that the hair-brush which lay on a table in the studio had just been burnishing Mr. Slingfield's superabundant locks.

He was small, plump, and florid; and Nell took him to be not more than six-and-twenty.

"I have no very important work on hand just now," said Mr. Slingfield; "but here is a small figure of myself, which may perhaps please you; it has been a good deal fancied," and he pointed to a statuette—the portrait of himself in the costume of a troubadour. "How do you

like the attitude?" inquired Mr. Slingfield; and as he spoke, he leaned negligently against the pedestal on which the figure stood in exact imitation of its pose. "It is my favourite attitude," he said. "Lady Fanny Carlyon thought it almost graceful."

"It isn't exactly a working attitude, is it?" said Nell.

"N—no. I have another attitude when I work; but sometimes, you know, I fall into this unconsciously, as it were—in a moment of inspiration, or when I am thinking out an idea. And a brother artist, seeing me thus one day, declared it such a remarkable pose, quite unique, in fact, that nothing would satisfy him but he must reproduce it on the spot; and this"—pointing to the statuette—"is the outcome. It is not in all respects the portrait I could have wished, nor perhaps what I might have made of myself; but for the sake of the pose I accept it. The price of a copy is ten pounds."

"You dreadful little man! I'd like to shake you," thought Nell.

Then, as Mr. Slingfield was taking out a note-book and pencil, apparently with the design of adding Nell's name to his subscription list, she made haste to explain the purpose of her visit, though with the sole desire to get away as quickly as possible.

But the notion of a pupil, however, flattered Mr. Slingfield's vanity immensely.

"I assure you," he said, with a smile in which the teeth had more part than his lips, "I appreciate the honour you do me in seeking me out as your teacher."

"But you are too busy to take pupils; I am sure you are," interposed Nell hurriedly. "I really ought not to detain you any longer from your work."

"My work? Let it wait!" replied Mr. Slingfield magnanimously, although it did not appear to Nell that Mr. Slingfield or anybody else would suffer greatly by this condescension; for there were not many evidences of work in the studio. "It is a charming profession," he went on. "The work itself rather dirty, perhaps, but you can always put the disagreeables on to an assistant. I should not think, now, of mixing the clay with my own hands."

"I suppose not," said Nell.

"Oh dear, no! And I should even permit an assistant

to build up a good part of a figure for me; that, too, is rather dirty and fatiguing."

"And may I venture to ask where your own labour would come in?"

"Well, I should superintend everything, you know. And when it came to the really important part, the finishing touches, the infusing of individuality, if I may so phrase it, there I should at once step in, and work—oh! work atrociously, I assure you."

"I don't quite see where the charm of the profession lies, if there is so much that is 'dirty and fatiguing' in it," said Nell.

"Well, what I mean is not, perhaps, that the profession itself is charming—on the whole, perhaps, the profession is rather a nuisance—but that it brings you into such delightful relations with good people. You would scarcely believe it, now, but yesterday I had two lords and a baronet here all at the same time; I had indeed."

"But still I am afraid that with so many distinguished visitors to your studio, and your work besides, you would not be able to devote much time to a pupil," replied Nell.

"Suppose I took you, now, could you introduce me to any good people? Have you any friends, for instance, who would be likely to buy copies of the statuette?"

"No, I'm afraid I couldn't introduce you to any one, except, perhaps, my landlord; and he wouldn't buy anything."

"My terms would be high, you know," said Mr. Slingfield, who began to think Nell was not of much use. "Only the other day the duchess said to me: 'Slingfield' (her grace always calls me Slingfield), 'when you take pupils, you'll have to put the price up, or you'll have your shop full of all the nicest girls in town.'"

"I am sure her grace's advice was excellent," answered Nell. "But that settles the matter so far as I am concerned, for I am as poor as poor can be."

"If I were you, now, I'd start as a model," said Mr. Slingfield, changing his tone. "With a figure like yours——"

"Good morning, Mr. Slingfield. I am much obliged to you, and sorry to have kept you so long from your work."

And before the little gentleman had time to reply, Nell was out of the studio, and half-way down the corridor.

CHAPTER XII.

NELL MEETS AN OLD GENTLEMAN.

NELL was no weakling, but it would be absurd to say that she was not disappointed and a trifle downcast by this her first failure. She had made three trials, and each of them had turned out a disappointment. To be sure, there was always the hope of hearing from the sculptor to whom she had given her address; but as day followed day, and no letter came, she despaired of help from that quarter.

The whole boarding-house was intensely interested in her efforts, and the professor, who did not ordinarily concern himself with other people's affairs, had once (after Nell had been unusually thoughtful of his wants at dinner) gone so far as to "reçkon, ma'am," in the hearing of every one, and for her especial benefit, "that Rome was not built in a däay."

Mr. Claypole had been overheard by the housemaid to inform the ear of the postman to the effect that he had serious doubts about the efficiency and trustworthiness of the British Post Office, and that if a letter were not soon forthcoming "for Miss Haffenden from a young mahn in the Aven-oo," he should have something to say about that "institootion" in a work he had in hand, which would probably result in the suicide of the Postmaster-General.

I don't know why it is that such an extraordinary amount of interest attaches to the beginnings of the artistic career. We are never tired of reading, in the case of poet, painter, novelist, or actor, the same old tale of youthful failure leading up to the villa on the Thames, *édition de luxe*, peerage, or whatever form the ultimate reward may take.

Who would have patience to listen to Jones, the successful young greengrocer, if he should attempt to tell on the doorstep how, having delivered potatoes for some time at Williams's, Mrs. Williams recommended him to Mrs. Edwards, who took cauliflowers as well?

Many were the suggestions which her fellow-boarders offered to Nell in those days of waiting and watching.

One of the girls counselled her to seek out "the boss sculptor in London," sit "right down" in his studio, and decline to "quit" except on a promise of work.

Miss M'Gee's notion was that Nell should model a group of Queen Victoria flanked by the British lion and Britannia, and drive with it to Her Majesty at Windsor Castle.

Old Joe Gripp used to pace his room in the basement, twirling his rusty moustache, and composing letters to *The Times* in denunciation of the shabbiness with which aspirants were treated by the leading artists.

All this, however, availed nothing, and Nell was as far as ever from the realisation of her hopes.

The parson had written to know what progress she was making, and whether she had yet reduced any considerable portion of the smoky metropolis; and Clymo had written in a different strain, asking if she were not tired yet of "playing the fine lady amongst lords and such-like in London there," and whether she wouldn't think his offer over again, and come back and "take a good situation as his wife" amongst "folk of her own standing."

To the Vicar she wrote at great length, telling him the little she had yet done, and all that she still hoped to do in the future, but bidding him not expect to hear great things of her for a long while to come.

To Clymo she replied briefly, but kindly, telling him that he was very far wrong if he really supposed she was playing the fine lady in London, and that, as for going back, she had never thought, and in the light in which Martin proposed it, never could think, of doing that.

She had now a variety of duties in the house, which curtailed her leisure, but so long as she had nothing more profitable to do she was very willing to be employed in a domestic capacity.

She found time, nevertheless, to explore much of the inexhaustible city—now in this direction, and now in that,

as occasion offered or curiosity prompted; learning the greater streets by heart, and searching out the nooks and byways, the old historic lanes and buildings, the places where great men had lived, and famous deeds had happened, with ever-springing interest and fascination.

The great parks in the west were among her favourite haunts. Kensington Gardens was her best-loved retreat. Town and country touch each other in that pleasant place. Under the trees in front of the old red palace, on a quiet afternoon in summer, the far-off echoes of the streets fall none too harshly on the ear; the foliage has the freshness, if not the variety, of a Surrey wood; and the grass, where the children have not romped too freely, is as crisp and strong and green as a young meadow.

Here Nell was sitting one afternoon, with a book and her thoughts for company. The Gardens were almost deserted, and extremely quiet; circumstances which were accounted for by the two soldiers' bands playing in the distance. Nell and a gentleman had the whole space under the trees to themselves.

The gentleman was tall, sallow, elderly, and pensive; with a slender pointed beard, iron-gray in colour, and moustache whose ends fell below the chin. He had dark eyes, deep-set under a projecting, wrinkled brow; his figure was slight but very upright, and in his dress, manner, and bearing, dignity was mingled with a quaint suggestion of melancholy. He was talking in a subdued tone to a small dog that lay at his feet, and as Nell watched him from under her eyelashes, she was irresistibly reminded of a picture of Don Quixote.

By-and-by the dog sniffed in a contemptuous way, as who should say, "My friend, you are handling the matter badly;" then, as the old gentleman continued his discourse, notwithstanding its pointed interruption, the dog got up, and walking away with no pretence at ceremony, went up to Nell, and wagged his tail in a friendly and patronising manner, as who should say, "Don't be afraid, my dear; I am only going to tell you what I think on this question."

But Nell, who disapproved of this cavalier treatment of the old gentleman, replied at once, "Go back to your master, sir."

Treated to the snub direct, the dog took up a middle position between the two, and barked rudely at both.

As the old gentleman and Nell were quite within speaking distance, he lifted his hat and said politely, and in slow, deliberate tones: "He is an ill-mannered dog; and yet I have reared him from childhood, with an extreme and delicate care."

"He looks very intelligent," replied Nell.

"He does," said the old gentleman dubiously; "and yet I am sorry to say that it is not so much intelligence as smartness, though I have endeavoured to impress upon him from the first that smartness is less a virtue than a vice. I have little doubt that the soul of a former pupil of mine, who died many years ago, has passed into him; he gives me so much trouble, and shows so little gratitude."

"It is a bad look-out for the pupil," said Nell.

"I cannot think that it is so bad as you imagine; the dog Grigson eats largely, and does no work, which was the habit of Frank, when he lived."

Here there came a pause in the conversation, during which Grigson so far bore out his master's description as to lie down and sleep soundly.

Presently the old gentleman said: "I think that you are fond of this spot?"

"Yes," answered Nell, "so I am; but—but how should you know that?"

"I sometimes walk through the Gardens in the afternoon, and see you sitting here. After seeing you several times, I said to myself, 'The lady is very fond of the Gardens, or it is perhaps that the hours are leisurely with her.'"

He spoke with such a gentle courtesy, and such an entire freedom from inquisitiveness, that Nell could not be offended.

She replied: "It is both—I am fond of the Gardens, and the hours are rather leisurely with me."

"'If the hours be leisurely,' I said to myself, 'it is that the lady finds no great work to do; she is not seriously occupied'—but I offend, I am a stranger, I have not the right——"

"You do not offend in the least," said Nell. "It is quite true that I am not very seriously occupied; but

one may be in such a position without either choice or inclination."

"Indeed, what you say is very true," replied the old gentleman feelingly, "but it would give me pain to think that this was your case."

"Nevertheless, it is," she answered.

The old gentleman was silent for a little while, then he said:

"This thing happens to nearly all of us at some time or other. I do not know which is the saddest—to be unable to find work that one longs for, or to find it and do it, and to learn when it is done that no one cares anything about it, and that one might just as well have left it undone."

"But I think," said Nell, "that if I had the work I want, the pleasure of doing it would be recompense enough."

The old gentleman smiled rather sadly, and began to shake his head, but stopped himself, and said: "It is hard that you should not find this work." He had in the meantime drawn his chair a trifle nearer to Nell's, and they sat facing one another. "If one might ask, without in any way giving offence," he went on, "what is this work that you seek?"

Nell hesitated. She was afraid of another rebuff. Yet how could she fear it from this courteous grave old man, who spoke so gently, and seemed so full of sympathy? He leaned forward a little in his chair, his dark eyes were fixed full on her, and his long sallow face preserved its expression of mingled kindness and melancholy.

She told him her desire to be an artist, and of her luckless first endeavours to obtain admission to the studios.

The old gentleman at once showed an extraordinary interest, and quite an eager look took possession of his pensive features. He watched her narrowly as she spoke, and when she had finished he said: "You have a fine enthusiasm; you are not yet too much discouraged. I wonder how long it would take to daunt you?"

Nell laughed. "Do you think that I must wait much longer?" she said.

"Some wait for years," he replied. Then he added, "I wonder what your talents are?"

As he spoke, he took up a straw satchel which he had been carrying, and went on:

"I have here some clay that the sculptor uses. It is a sample of a new kind which I am carrying to a friend who is a sculptor. It is moist, and is ready for use. Will you take it and make some small thing for me?"

"Here?" said Nell. "Now?"

The old man nodded gravely.

Nell drew off her gloves with a feeling half-amused and half-frightened. It was such an odd request, at such a time, and in such a place. Fortunately the part of the Gardens where they were sitting was still very quiet, and no one noticed this queer interview.

Nell put back her cuffs, and took a portion of the clay in her hands.

"What am I to make for you?" she asked.

The old man thought for a moment, and answered:

"Model me a Sigh."

Nell smiled and looked incredulous, but he said again, "Model me, if you will be so kind, a little sigh."

A slight sigh escaped him as he said it. Nell noticed this, and after a moment's hesitation began to work upon the clay. Her quick fingers went in and out, and the old gentleman watched, but she held the clay so that he could not see her work.

In about a quarter of an hour she said, "It is done," and gave the model into his hands.

It was a portrait, or rather a sketch of himself. It was roughly and hurriedly done, but she had caught with great cleverness the gentle and rather melancholy set of the features, and the half-parting of the lips, as if in the act of sighing, was a happy touch of realism. The old gentleman was delighted. He laughed almost merrily.

"It was an unfair task to set you, but you have turned upon me very cleverly," he said. I should like to show this to my friend; but it will not keep in this state. No matter for that. I shall, if permitted, do myself the honour to present you to my friend. I cannot say what he will do, but I shall endeavour to interest him. I will ask you to be so kind as to call at his house on the day after to-morrow, when I will be there." Taking out a visiting-card, he gave

it to Nell, and putting the model into the satchel, where doubtless it soon fell to pieces, he raised his hat and bowed, and walked slowly away, the dog Grigson following.

Nell went home with a high heart. She reached Keppel Street only just in time for dinner. Joe was in the window, waving a letter at her, all the boarders behind him. She took it from him eagerly when she saw the "S.W." post-mark in the corner, in the hope that, as she had just had one stroke of fortune, another might be about to follow. She broke the seal, and observing that the letter was dated from the Avenue, began to read it anxiously. Disappointment followed. It was a polite and kindly note to say that the sculptor "had not been able to procure any opening for Miss Haffenden, but that she must not despair of ultimately," etc.

"Atrocious!" exclaimed Joe. "I've had that letter propped up in front of me for the last two hours with a downright conviction there was fortune in it. What's to come next, I wonder?"

"Dinner, sir, if *you* please," said the professor severely, amid a chorus of sympathetic and consolatory ejaculations on Nell's behalf from all the rest of the boarders.

"I reckon, ma'am, that when your star *does* rise, it's going to blaze, in a truly surprising manner," said Mr. Claypole.

"That's so, sir," observed Miss M'Gee. "It won't be any rushlight;" and Miss Anderson remarked with emphasis that "the present company could go their whole pile on that."

When she had satisfied the pressing requirements of the professor, Nell related her adventure in the Park, and the chorus of sympathy was changed into one of congratulation.

"Well, girls, I don't know what you've got to say," said Miss Anderson, "but *I* call that a puffectly glorious old man."

"Puffectly glorious!" echoed the others, and then they fell to speculating who the old gentleman could be. Mr. Claypole was willing to bet that, as the interview had taken place in sight of Kensington Palace, he was a member of the British Royal Family; but Miss M'Gee dissented from this, on the ground that there was no body-guard in attendance; and Miss Anderson inquired with some asperity

where the person could have been "raised" who supposed that British royalty walked in the parks with a terrier dog at its heels and a bag of clay in its hand.

"It's likely a dook. I'll trouble you for a little more of the gravy, ma'am," put in the professor.

"Let him go at that—a dook is a dook, I reckon," said Mr. Claypole.

"A dook is not small pumpkins by any means, I guess," said Miss Anderson, and the company generally "allowed" that that was so, and agreed to "let him go at a dook."

"The day after to-morrow" seemed a long while coming; but it came at last. Nell, who had waited impatiently, wanted to start off as early as possible, but, as ill-luck would have it, this happened to be what Joe called one of Teresa's field-days, when all her ailments attacked her at once, and she required as much attention as would have sufficed for a wardful of hospital patients.

On occasions like this every one and everything gave way before the needs of Miss Gripp, and as she would have no one but Nell to wait upon her, it followed, as a matter of course, that the general affairs of the house went altogether wrong.

Joe, who was not less eager than Nell that she should not fail in her appointment, made piteous apologies.

"An ordinary sort of person," said he, "could have a bout of this kind, and nobody else know anything about it: but when complications set in with a person of Teresa's intellect—well, where are you then? Where's anybody? This comes of a fine nervous system."

However, Nell got away at last, and made for South Kensington. The name and address on the card which the old gentleman had given her were "Mr. Julian Harte, The Abbey, Campden Hill." At the foot of the Hill she stopped to look at and admire a vast house in red brick, whose grounds, extending half-way up the hill, were enclosed within a high red wall. In the centre of the wall was an oaken door, which stood partly open; Nell went up to it, and peeped in. She saw a garden whose like she had not seen anywhere since she left the country; indeed she was not sure that she had ever before seen one so beautiful.

Large as it was, the manner in which it was laid out

made it seem larger. At the upper end there was what looked like an orchard : she could see apple and pear-trees growing thickly. Beyond this, and nearer to the house, was a smooth space of grass, arranged as a tennis court; beyond this there were white paths losing themselves amongst shrubberies, and in the centre of a miniature grove of limes a fountain of gray stone curiously carved was spouting water. Immediately in front of the house the ground was laid out in flower-beds, filled with the gayest blooms, and everywhere about the garden were statues, busts, and statuettes, whose clear surfaces, shining amongst the foliage, must have been preserved in some wonderful way against the destructive effects of the atmosphere.

Nell looked long and wonderingly into this fairy-like garden, and was just moving away, when the tall, grave figure of the old gentleman whom she was seeking came out from one of the paths and went towards the house. She looked up quickly at the door in the wall, and saw "The Abbey" written across the panels.

An exclamation of surprise escaped her; the old gentleman heard it. He turned and saw her, and came forward smiling.

"Ah-h," he said in his slow, gentle way, "you have been so kind as to come? You were looking at the little garden; does it give you pleasure?"

"It is delightful," said Nell—"wonderful! I did not think such a garden could be in London."

"Will it please you to come in, and we will walk round it?" he said, and she went in, and the old gentleman pulled to the oaken door, and led her round the garden.

Nell's feelings were of unmixed delight. There was an air of romance over everything within the high red walls of the garden. She felt as if she had on a sudden stepped from realistic London, with its streets and shops and omnibuses, into a little enchanted kingdom, which had nothing in common with a vulgar workaday world.

The old gentleman, too, seemed quite in keeping with his surroundings. He was unlike any one she had ever seen. He was not like the Vicar, though Nell already began to feel toward him as she had always felt in the presence of her old friend and tutor. There was a sweet and wholesome air about him which put her in mind of Mr.

Meadowsweet; yet it was certain that the two men had little else in common.

They walked and talked in the garden, with the sun glancing amongst the trees, gilding the statues, and giving a hundred changing tints to the waters of the fountain.

But the old gentleman made no mention of his friend the sculptor.

Nell began to wonder whether the dreams she had been indulging since the meeting in Kensington Gardens were about to be dispelled.

"Perhaps I am too late," she said to herself. "Perhaps the sculptor has been here and has gone away. Perhaps"—and this, though the saddest, seemed the most probable—"perhaps he is like the others, and will not have anything to say to me."

They were standing by the fountain when the old gentleman said abruptly, and speaking rather to himself than to Nell:

"Certainly, in England, the profession of a sculptor is a hard one."

Nell made no answer, because the observation did not seem to be spoken directly to her, but the words fell sharply on her ear, and she thought, "He is going to do like the others; he is going to try and discourage me."

Then he turned to her and said:

"A great painter in England has much repute; a sculptor is scarcely known. What will you say to me about that?"

"I can only say," answered Nell, "what I said the other day in the Gardens—that it seems to me the pleasure of the work would be almost enough."

"It is not enough," replied the old man. "It is a great deal, but it is not enough. Over and above the pleasure that he has in his work, every true artist feels that he has a mission to the world; if his mission be not accepted, he will think that he has failed, and where is his pleasure then?"

"But sometimes the fruit of one's work is long in ripening," answered Nell, with something of hesitation in her tone. "Some of the greatest missions have succeeded fully long after the worker has laid down his work."

"Are you content to wait?" he asked.

"I do not know," she answered slowly. "All I know is that I want to be an artist."

"Come then," he said, speaking more decidedly, "let us go in."

He led the way to the house. One of the windows, reaching to the ground, opened on to the flowers and the sun, and Nell caught a glimpse beyond of a room richly furnished and hung with pictures. But instead of going into the house the old gentleman turned into a corridor, or cloister, with Gothic arches, which connected the house with a long, lofty building at right angles to it.

As they entered the corridor Nell started with a quick feeling of surprise, for the sound of a chisel came distinctly from the building they were approaching.

The old gentleman opened a door, and in another moment they stood in a sculptor's studio.

A cry of pleasure broke from Nell. She understood it all in an instant. The old gentleman was himself "My friend, the sculptor."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHO TURNS OUT TO BE A RATHER INTERESTING PERSON.

NELL stood on the threshold of the studio, scarcely knowing what to say or do or think. For a moment or two she was in dreamland again. Nothing seemed real. The beautiful garden, with its trees and fountain and flowers; the strange old gentleman, who looked like Don Quixote; the vine-hung cloisters; the studio itself, with all its teeming suggestions of the artist life—everything seemed for the moment to be but a part of the "baseless fabric" of some pleasant vision.

Then the clear ring of a chisel fell on her ear again, and she awoke, and the reality was as delicious as the dream.

The old sculptor stood by, enjoying to the full her pleased bewilderment.

"It is you who are the sculptor?" she said at length, looking up at him with a mixture of timidity and extreme satisfaction.

"I have deceived you; there is an apology to be made. Yes, I am the sculptor, and this is my studio," he replied. Then he added, "Let me show it to you;" and he went forward, and she followed him.

The room they were in was of great size; long, wide, and lofty, and lighted from the top. At the first glance you would have thought that it was in a terrible litter, but by degrees, when the eye became accustomed to the arrangement, everything was seen to be in its place—the studio of a busy sculptor is not capable of the neatness of a boudoir. A great figure in an early stage of creation stood in the centre. It was a study of Achilles, the sculptor said, on which he

was then working; and as he described it he took up a lump of clay and did something to one of the limbs. Nell wondered at the lightness and rapidity of his touch. Models of all kinds stood about the room, and Nell noticed that the greater number of the subjects were classical. To one who knows how and cares to read the progress of genius, from its first rude beginnings upward through many stages to its final and most perfect expression, there is no place more interesting than the studio of a great sculptor. Nell's critical faculties were not yet sufficiently matured to enable her to read with accuracy the history of the career that was outlined before her in the works that crowded the studio of Julian Harte; but what she could not do, he did for her.

Picking out a little wooden statuette, dusty and stained, from a corner of a shelf, he said:

"This was the first thing I did that had any merit. I carved this when I was eighteen, fifty-five years ago."

Proceeding, he went from one model to another, explaining every step by which he had advanced in his art. He spoke simply and candidly, without self-praise or self-depreciation; with only the straightforward confidence of one who knew the good and the bad in his own work. It was the manner of a careful master with a pupil, and everything that he said gave Nell a deeper insight into the sculptor's art.

He showed her an admirable model which he had done at eight-and-twenty. "This," he said, "marks the finish of a period; I made no advance upon this for several years."

An exquisite statuette of Ophelia marked the commencement of a new period; and from this there was a rapid advance, and, guided by his words, she seemed at length to see his growing power in his art as he showed her a series of the works that had followed, and pointed to the details of workmanship which showed that the hand of the master was succeeding that of the amateur.

He stopped at length before a noble statue of Hector. "This is my best," he said, and added, "but I was already an old man when I did that."

On a shelf over a wide stone fireplace lay the broken pieces of the rough sketch which Nell had made in the Gardens. The sculptor took them down and pieced them

together on a table. To Nell, with her mind full of the beauties that were heaped around her, this seemed a poor little thing indeed; but the sculptor, holding it in his hands, looked at it long and seriously. Nell watched him with curious eyes and rather a sinking heart. He said at last:

"I like this. There is humour in it and character, and the touch is firm."

Nell's heart rose, but she thought he might say next, "Study for a year or two, and come and see me then."

What he did say was, "Will you come to me and be my pupil?"

"Will you really take me?" was all Nell could say in reply.

"It will be a great pleasure to me," he said. "I have one pupil now, but I mean to send him away very soon. He is almost ready to be his own master. You and I will then work together. There is my wife, too, who helps me with her brain, and does a great deal besides with her pencil. She is always at work in one of the rooms here; you must see her before you go."

It need not be said how delightful all this sounded to Nell. Just then the sculptor was summoned to see a visitor, and, left alone in the studio, she fell to wondering how all this great fortune had come to her, and whether it were quite real, and if it were, whether it might not slip from her as strangely and as suddenly as it had come.

The sculptor, on leaving her, had gone into one of the smaller rooms adjoining the great studio, and was speaking with some one whose voice sounded like a girl's. From the few words that reached her, Nell gathered that it was a model who had come to look for work; and she remembered how the other artists had told her that that was what she ought to do, and she almost cried for pleasure at the thought of the new life that seemed to be opening before her.

All this while the chisel that she had heard when she first came near the studio kept up a continuous chip, chip, in an adjoining room.

Nell went quietly to the door of this room and looked in. It was a small room, and seemed to be nearly filled by a life-size marble statue, fixed on a wooden stand which

moved on an axle. It was an ideal study of "Summer," personified by a nymph who had just disrobed herself for a plunge in some woodland stream. A man on his knees was working with chisel and mallet at the lower portion of the figure. His back was toward Nell, but as he lifted his head to take an upward glance at his work, and a ray of light caught his bright wavy hair, a glad look of recognition shot from Nell's eyes, and she was very near uttering an exclamation. But she checked herself, and stood to watch the artist at his work.

He was absorbed in it; he had not heard her walk across the studio; he did not hear her when she stopped at the door. His eyes never wandered from his chisel, except when he paused for a moment to glance over the marble; the look on his face showed how wholly his mind was in his work. Nell thought him even handsomer than when she had seen him first, but she liked better than his handsome face the intent and steadfast look which declared the real artist-nature in love with its own lovely work.

She was scarcely less absorbed in watching than the sculptor was in working. She noted the precision and exactness with which the chisel did his bidding, the unerring aim, and how sharply the steel bit the marble at every stroke of the mallet. Chip, chip, chip—the hard white marble took on the smoothness of ivory under the sculptor's magic touch. The rigid stone was as wax in his hands; he did with it what he pleased. Chip, chip, chip——

"It is almost alive!" exclaimed Nell at length, in an eager whisper.

The sculptor turned quickly and rose to his feet; he let his chisel and mallet fall; he jumped to the ground; he took both Nell's hands in his.

"Nymph! nymph! a thousand times more fair than mine, where have you come from?"

"From America in Bloomsbury. Oh, how beautiful your work is!"

"Why are you here? How are you here? Why not before? Why now? I have been so often to the Museum that the policeman thinks I have gunpowder designs upon it, and will scarcely let me pass. Oh! but I am glad to see you. How are you here? Why don't you tell me?"

"I am here because—because Mr. Harte is going to take me for his pupil. I am going to be here always!"

"Angels and ministers of grace—what tidings! Do you know that only last night I dreamed the Chief was going to do me some extraordinary good turn, and all day I have been wondering what it would be. Sit down, and let us talk a whole novel about it."

She told him her adventure at the studios, and he laughed as he recognised the sculptors by her descriptions. Then she told him of her meeting with Mr. Harte in Kensington Gardens, of what he had said to her, and what she had said to him; how he asked her to model him a sigh, and how she had taken his own portrait, and how he had then asked her to come to his house, and meet his friend the sculptor, with whom he was to try and make interest for her.

"How like the Chief it all is!" said Horace, laughing. "Do you know, I fancied there was a plot of some kind working in his mind all day yesterday; he talked with himself and laughed so."

"So you have found one another out, my friends?" said the Chief himself, coming to the door.

"Yes, Chief, and we have found *you* out. Chief, you are altogether too deep for an artist; you should have followed some baser trade."

"Horace," said Mr. Harte, turning to Nell, "is always very glad of an interruption in his work. He would willingly lay aside his apron now, and sit there inventing malicious things about me for the rest of the day."

"Oh, but you don't know how hard he was working just now," said Nell.

"He heard you coming"—and the Chief laughed his gentle laugh, in which there was a world of goodness.

"The truth is, you know, the Chief is jealous," said Horace in a stage whisper, to Nell. "He wanted to do a 'nymph' like mine, and Mrs. Harte wouldn't permit it."

"Oh, Horace, you wicked boy!" said a lady's voice, and Mrs. Harte herself appeared in the doorway. She was between fifty-five and sixty years of age; not so tall as Nell, nor so fine in figure, but very graceful, and with a sweet face and a quiet, musical voice.

[illegible] hardly wanted to be introduced to Nell, but took [illegible] hand, and said how pleased she was to hear what

her husband had just told her, and how she hoped Nell would soon win her way in her profession.

"She is going to set this idle 'prentice here an example of industry," said Mr. Harte.

"And of temperance, meekness, and charity," put in the 'prentice whom no reproof seemed to touch.

"Miss Haffenden has a tremendous, a really Herculean task before her," he went on. "You know, Mrs. Harte, she has undertaken to beautify the streets of the metropolis with statuary."

"Oh, it is not true. I have not undertaken anything of the kind. I said," continued Nell, turning to Mrs. Harte, "that it was a work which he and his brother artists might do—yes, and ought to do."

"Hear!" said Horace gravely. "When do you propose to begin, Chief? We will illustrate the life and spirit of the age in every department. You shall take the church."

"He will sit there for a year, and devise work for other people," said Mrs. Harte. "I am not going to listen to him any more; and any one who wants tea had better follow me. Horace has wasted so much time that he must go on with his work;" which command Horace promptly obeyed by putting his chisel in an all but inaccessible place on the top of a shelf and leading the way through the studio to the cloisters, where tea was laid.

The mention of tea reminded Nell that she was in a fair way to be late for dinner, so she had no choice but to decline Mrs. Harte's invitation, and leave that pleasant company for the Keppel street dinner-table.

"In a week from to-day,then, you will enter your studentship?" said Mr. Harte; for Nell had said that she would have to arrange some household matters before beginning her new work in a regular manner.

"How can I thank you enough?" she said in a low tone to the old sculptor, as she took her leave.

"What have I done?" he answered, gently. "You shall not thank me at all. I think you are going to be not so much my pupil as my helper."

Horace went with her to the door of the garden.

"It looks bare out here, doesn't it?" he said, glancing down the street. "A great scheme; we must put it in hand at once."

He stood at the door waving his hand until Nell was out of sight; a passer-by would have been puzzled to know whether they were lover and sweetheart, or brother and sister.

The clock on the parish church of Kensington struck half-past six as Nell reached it.

"Why, they're just sitting down to dinner," she thought, in alarm. "What will Mr. Gripp do? What will the professor do?"

"'Ansom, miss?" said a passing Jehu, as Nell stood on the pavement, wondering by what quickest means she could get home.

The temptation was great. She had never ridden in a hansom cab in her life; and, in addition to her anxiety to reach the boarding-house as quickly as possible, there was the sense of elation, and something like a vision of immediate wealth, the result of Mr. Harte's promise to take her as his pupil.

"Yes, please," she said; and the driver, who had been surreptitiously tickling his horse's flanks with the whip to provoke the animal to a display of mettle, pulled up short, and Nell jumped in.

She peeped in at the window of the boarding-house as she got out of the cab and rang at the bell; and could see that Mr. Gripp and the professor were the only occupants of the dining-room. "They haven't been long about dinner," she thought.

The first thing she saw when she got in was the diminutive person of Miss M'Gee, "humped," as the young lady herself would have said, at the foot of the stairs. Nell thought at first that she was crying, but though there were indeed tears on the countenance which Miss M'Gee lifted when Nell went to her, they were tears of uncontrollable laughter.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked Nell; but Miss M'Gee, unable to frame a word, only pointed to the dining-room and laughed as though her ribs would give way.

A sound of irate speech came through the half-closed door. It was the professor who was speaking.

"Sir," said the professor, his voice rising as he proceeded, "there was not two ounces of preserves in the entire pudding!"

"Listen!" said Miss M'Gee. "Oh, he'll kill me! Oh my! it was worth crossing the pond only for this."

"What is it all about?" whispered Nell.

"I took your place at dinner, and gave him the wrong end of the pud-pud-pudding, ma'am. There wasn't any jam in it. Oh my! Oh!" And a fresh spasm seized her, and she leaned against the wall and sobbed again.

"The cook——" began Mr. Gripp, with genuine tears in his voice, but the professor would have none of the cook.

"Teresa——" he tried next, but the professor waved down Teresa.

"I will have no subterfuge—I demand a PUDDING," said the professor, who at that hour of the evening might as well have demanded the Koh-i-noor.

"If we had only had Miss Wiffenden——" began Joe again, at his wits' end for an acceptable apology, but the professor interrupted him with,

"Thunder, sir! have I crossed the Atlantic to be fed with the blind end of a jam-roll? A bread-pudding yesterday, and a batter the day before, and to-day a spoonful of gooseberry preserves and——"

"Joseph!" screamed Miss Gripp, from the kitchen, "prepare that person's bill, and let him go."

All the rest of the boarders were in the drawing-room, scarcely less hilarious than Miss M'Gee on the stairs; Mr. Claypole alone amongst them was unmoved, but, with his note-book on his knees he was taking diligent notes of the proceedings for the work that was to be dedicated to Queen Victoria.

"If you could fancy anything particular for breakfast to-morrow, professor——" said Joe, but the professor cut him short.

"Sir, before I breakfast I've got to dine. I am going out now to dine at a ho-tel; p'r'aps at two or three ho-tels, for I reckon I shall dine sur-prisingly; and when I've dined I'll bring the bill right away home here, and you shall be so good as to de-fray that bill!" And flinging into the hall, the professor seized Mr. Claypole's hat, and some one else's umbrella, and went out like a hurricane.

"Hum! I'll keep no more boarding-house," said Joe, coming out of the dining-room, and looking as though he

had had a series of Turkish baths. "This has finished me."

"The professor's real mean," said Miss Anderson, in a sympathising tone. "But wasn't he puffectly delightful!"

"It was a byutiful pudding, sir," said Miss M'Gee, who had scarcely yet recovered, and who, as she said herself, was "ready to go to pieces" again at any moment.

In the midst of this commotion Nell forgot her own affair, with which she had been brimming over when she came home; but, as soon as the volcanic departure of the professor had restored the quiet of the house, she found out Mary Meadows and told her of the fortune that had befallen her.

"You don't mean really to say that it's Julian Harte?" said Miss Meadows; for Nell, preferring to wait the issue of the matter, had not before told the old gentleman's name. "Why, he's the very first sculptor in London!" and Miss Meadows, in delight at her friend's good fortune, jumped up and told Miss Anderson, and Miss Anderson told Miss M'Gee, and Miss M'Gee told the whole house.

As for Nell, she was quite taken aback. "One would think I had built a cathedral," she said; but Mr. Claypole declared his belief that she could build the New Jerusalem if she put her hand to it.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SLIGHT SHIFTING OF DUTIES.

MISS GRIPP was as pleased as the rest at Nell's prospect of advance, but not quite so pleased at the notion of losing her help in the house. "You really are a most fortunate girl," she said, "and I think you deserve your fortune; but —what is to become of me?"

Nell had grown quite accustomed by this time to Miss Gripp's habit of looking at everything from the standpoint of her own interest, and was generous enough to make due allowance for the ill-health which made her cling with nervous selfishness to a stronger nature than her own. Devoted as he was to her, patiently and unweariedly as he served her, she had not the smallest faith in her brother, and had now accustomed herself to rely so entirely upon Nell, that she regarded with querulous dismay the idea of falling back again on the generalship of Joe. "Go and bring him here, dear," she said, "and let us talk the matter over."

Joe brought his stiff leg and his pipe with alacrity into Teresa's room, and was no less speedily dismissed, with injunctions to lay aside his pipe, and bring his necktie, if he could, from the back to the front of his collar.

"I often wonder, Joseph," she said, when he returned, "if you really can be the son of my father, whose personal neatness was a proverb in the family;" and Joe in reply expressed a meek belief that the paternal virtues had been wholly absorbed by his sister. "I have sent for you, Joseph," continued Teresa, "that you may hear what Miss Haffenden and I have to say on the subject of her engagement with Mr. Julian Harte, the sculptor."

Ha! A splendid thing for Miss Haffenden," said Joe, enthusiastically. "I always knew she had a great future; she has your forehead, Teresa."

"Miss Haffenden has a great deal of talent, as I informed her from the first," replied Miss Gripp; "but that is not the subject immediately under discussion. I have put the question to Miss Haffenden—what is to become of me if she leaves my house?"

"Yes; but I don't want to leave it, Miss Gripp," put in Nell, emphatically.

"Who," continued Miss Gripp, pursuing her interrogatories, "who is to attend to the marketing?" and Joe winced at the thought of the iniquitous bargains which butchers and bakers had forced upon him in the days when he was caterer. "Who is to take the head of the table, and prevent the recurrence of scenes which would disgrace a tavern or a vestry?" and Joe shuddered at the remembrance of the professor's demand for pudding. "Who is to see that the servants leave their beds at a proper hour in the morning?" and Joe very nearly sneezed as he thought of the colds he had caught in thundering at the cook's bedchamber, in nightgown and slippers, at half-past six on winter mornings. "You see, dear," went on Miss Gripp, addressing herself directly to Nell, "it is really out of the question that you should leave my house."

"Yes, Miss Gripp, but I never had the least intention of doing so."

"Ha! she never had the least intention of doing so," echoed Joe, in a tone of extreme satisfaction.

"You have become necessary to my establishment," continued Miss Gripp; "in fact you have, I may say, become a part of it. You appear to me to be the only one here who is capable of giving even a semblance of satisfaction to that abominable person from Boston. Had you been present, I do not believe that scandalous scene in the dining-room would ever have occurred; for, as regards any influence that he is capable of exercising in a crisis of that sort, my brother, I regret to say, might just as well be his own grandmother."

"Intellect, you see, is what is wanted then," observed Joe, in a tone which signified a complete renunciation of intellectual claims on his own part.

"Mr. Gripp showed a great deal more forbearance on that occasion than I should have done, I think," said Nell.

"What my brother ought to have shown was a great deal less forbearance," said Miss Gripp. "However, that is past. The thing to be agreed upon now, Miss Haffenden, is that you really cannot and must not leave me."

"Dear Miss Gripp, I have already said that I never had any such intention. This is my home; I have no other; how could I leave it?"

"Very well," said Miss Gripp, "that is all right; but you must be relieved of some of your duties, for I suppose you will want to be away a great part of the day in future."

"I can do nearly everything that I do now, I think," answered Nell, who had no desire that Joe should go back to his drudgery.

"Put as much on to me as you like," said Joe. "Good heavens! You don't know what I've learned in the way of management from you, Miss Haffenden. You see, Teresa, Miss Haffenden has been kind enough to explain many little matters, in which, before she came, my knowledge was—shall I say defective!"

"You may truthfully say that, Joseph."

"As you say, Teresa — entirely so. But that has been in great measure—hum—remedied. You are not aware, Teresa, I think, that the shoulder of mutton which you were kind enough to praise last night was a purchase of mine?"

"Then Miss Haffenden has been teaching you to some purpose, Joseph. Well, I shall leave it to you, Miss Haffenden, to arrange the matter with my brother. As he said, you must put whatever you think proper on to him. But yours, if you please, must be the controlling mind in everything."

"It could not be otherwise," said Joe; and Miss Gripp lay back on her sofa and uncorked a medicine-bottle as a signal that the conference was at an end.

It was easy enough for Nell and Joe to settle matters between them in the subterranean retreat adjoining the kitchen, where the awesome presence of Teresa was wanting.

"Ha!" said Joe, as he led the way into this miniature penitentiary. "Here we are at our ease—off duty, as I may say. Teresa's personality is, between ourselves, a most tremendous thing. If you're sure you don't mind, I'll light my pipe."

"Yes, you may smoke," said Nell. "Now, I shall be away always in the middle of the day; you must be responsible then. You can manage the lunch easily?"

"Lunch? Tut! Hash and a rice-pudding."

"Very well; then that's settled. I shall have time for everything else. I shall market on my way to the studio, and shall always get home by six o'clock."

Nell felt as if she were at a turning-point in her life. She could not sufficiently wonder at the readiness with which the path that she had thought would be so hard to find had opened itself before her. She had just tasted difficulty, and that was all. She was half-inclined to be disappointed that everything had gone so smoothly with her. She had a romantic notion that there ought to have been some battling with fortune before the smallest victory was won. Short commons and an attic had entered her dreams of the first five or ten years of an artist's life; and the small rebuffs she had met with at the outset had seemed on reflection to be altogether contemptible as an introduction to the proper and natural period of adversity.

She passed the next few days in a state of delicious unrest. She could not settle anywhere or to anything. She tried her hand at a little modelling in her own room, but neither could the mind be brought to direct, nor the fingers to obey; so she gave up the effort, and abandoned herself once more to dreams of that future which was so soon to be present.

A strict adherence to fact compels it to be said that the affairs of the boarding-house were the least bit the worse for Nell's eagerness about other and more congenial matters. In her place at table she was not altogether so alert as she had been; the professor, for instance, had on one occasion to cough three times before he could draw her attention to the circumstance that his plate needed replenishing; but as he knew Nell for his best friend, he bore his wrongs in silence, and went for a double portion of cheese.

CHAPTER XV.

NELL BEGINS HER STUDIO LIFE.

AT the end of her first week under Julian Harte, it seemed to Nell that she had scarcely begun to taste the pleasures of studio life; at the end of a fortnight her sensations were as vivid as ever, the newness and romance of everything remained as on the first day.

It was a new existence. Indeed, she seemed to herself to be living at this time two distinct and separate lives. As Miss Gripp's lieutenant, as housekeeper, cateress, and general manager, and as a member of the heterogeneous set which composed the Anglo-American boarding-house, she was one person; as Julian Harte's pupil, and one of the little circle drawn together in his studio by ties of art and friendship, accordant in all matters artistic, and working singly and collectively for the good of each and all, she felt herself to be another and a very different person. She brought into the studio all the brightness and warmth of her nature; she brought a quick, vivacious mind, endless curiosity, a winsome face, a lively voice, and the sunshine of smiles and laughter.

Leading out of the large room in which the Chief worked, were several smaller ones. Horace occupied one of these; Mrs. Harte had her easel in another, and adjoining hers was a tiny room which was allotted to Nell. These two rooms were curtained off, so that when the others were engaged with a model they might work uninterruptedly.

Horace's "Nymph" being very near completion, he had almost dispensed with the services of the sitter; but

she came one day, when he was putting some final touches to the figure. Nell went into the room when she thought the model had left; it was empty, and she was going out again, when a curtain at the far end of the room was pushed aside, and a girl came out.

Nell started and blushed involuntarily, for the girl was dressed only in her smooth white skin.

She would have gone away, but before she could say, "I beg your pardon," the model, in no way disconcerted, exclaimed with a laugh, "I've lost my garter!"

Nell thought her the prettiest creature she had ever seen. There was not a trace of intellect in her face, but it was a face of pure physical beauty, and the form was as perfect as the face. There was a certain softness, too, about face and form which captivated, and something simple and good in the merry brown eyes, that was more captivating still. Nell, to whom beauty in any form appealed very strongly, looked admiringly on this fair vision, until the model, perceiving her pleasure, said, with another laugh, in which the whiteness of her teeth showed against her ruddy lips: "You like me, don't you?"

"I think you are most beautiful," Nell answered simply.

"I'll pose for you, and you shall compare me with the figure," said the model; and with fairy foot she leaped on to the pedestal where she had been standing, and threw herself into the attitude of Horace's statue.

"There!" she said. "Now, which of us is the prettiest?"

"I think," answered Nell, "that you are both perfection; but until I saw you, I did not think that anything so beautiful as the statue existed."

"That's nice! After that I shall put on another sixpence an hour," said the model.

She jumped from the pedestal, and picking up with her toe a light gauze wrapper which lay on the ground, threw it over her shoulders, and began to walk round the statue, criticising it in detail.

"He's made my waist ever so much too big," she said, with a pout. "But he says people didn't have any waists then. Fancy living in a time like that! Do you think he's

given me leg enough?" And she put out her own straight limb against the marble, and looked from one to the other with a doubtful air.

In this way she went on discussing the statue and herself with a child-like openness which amused Nell greatly.

"Do you like your profession?" asked Nell.

"It's not so bad," answered the girl. "One's got to live somehow, you know; and if you can't make a living out of your head, why, you'd better make it out of your figure. I've got no brains, but I've got this anyway," and her brown eyes twinkled as she surveyed her dainty little person in a mirror. "Now, I'm getting cold," she said, when she had sufficiently admired herself. "I'm going to get dressed. Good-bye. Mind you tell him I'm worth another sixpence an hour," and with a laugh she vanished behind the curtain, where Nell, returning to her own room, could hear her singing as she dressed.

Nell was much taken with this lively little *figurante*, but when she came to reflect on their interview, she found that it had left a somewhat uncomfortable impression on her mind. There was a feeling which she could not quite account for or resolve. The girl was good? Yes; she was sure of that; she had seemed to be innocence itself; and yet——?

She talked to Mrs. Harte, who gave her a view of the matter, brief, philosophical, and kindly.

"You must not trouble yourself at all about that," said Mrs. Harte. "To the artist it is the most natural thing in the world. His art requires it, and there's the beginning and the end of the matter. To the girl—well, it's her profession, and there's the beginning and the end of it with her. There is trust on the one side and honour on the other."

Nell was content, and by-and-by, when her experience had widened, she understood thoroughly what an honest simplicity ruled the relation between the artist and his model.

Meanwhile she was at work, though as yet she did not dare to dub herself a sculptor. Harte would have her begin with small things.

"There is no royal road," he said; "we start on a small

path, and with small steps. If there be a little timidity it is all the better; for I can tell you there are pitfalls." He said besides: "Your fingers tingle to begin, eh? No matter, they must be allowed to tingle for awhile. Use your eyes first."

So at the outset she had nothing to do but wander over the studio, from one room to another, and observe well the things that she saw. She did not get tired of this, though she began soon to wonder how long it was to last. It was not until she grew familiar with everything in the studio that she perceived how valuable this part of the training was. She was receiving a first great lesson; she was taking in the idea and the meaning of form. He would make her stand in front of one of his figures, and note it, first in detail, part by part, and then as a whole. In this way she came to know the proportions of the human frame, and could carry in her mind the shape of every limb, the size, and relative size; the bearings of the head to the torso, of the torso to the limbs.

He made her study anatomy in casts and drawings, and the mystery of line and curve. He made her study drawings of the masterpieces of sculpture in all ages historically; so that she could trace the art of the Greeks to its culmination with Phidias, and its steady decline from him to the lowest of his successors; and from that, the art of one age and one country after another—Italy, Germany, France, England; mediæval, Renaissance, modern.

She liked best to watch the Chief himself at work. She would stand contentedly by the hour, her head thrown back, her hands clasped behind her; he working with swift, quiet fingers all the while, and talking too, when he wanted to suggest or explain. The fingers moved nimbly, but the work went forward slowly; he would spend an afternoon on a curve in the neck or throat, on a foot, a hand, or the muscles of a limb; and sometimes he would send for Horace or his wife, and there would be half an hour's discussion, whether this leg were a trifle too stiff, or that arm a little too much bent, or the head thrown too far forward; and from this it resulted often that one whole day was spent in undoing the labour of the day before. While he was at work he was wholly absorbed, and you would think that he had no ideas but of sculpture in his head.

At other times he was full of small pleasantries, and had a quiet vein of humour which he liked to indulge. He had a great blackboard on which he sometimes sketched out an idea in the rough, and here he was fond of making caricature portraits of the inmates of the studio, the models, and any chance visitor. Sometimes he indulged in a gentle practical joke. It occurred to him one day that Horace was letting his hair grow too long, and when he left off work, he was busy by himself in a corner of the studio. By-and-by he called Nell to come and see "a capital likeness of our industrious young friend in the other room," and when she went he displayed an inverted mop rigged out in Horace's coat. After that Horace visited the barber.

Horace, in these days, was perpetually finding some difficulty in his work, which Nell's assistance was needed to overcome.

"Didn't Nell think some small alteration was necessary here? Yes? Then would she mind standing by while he made it?"

A very inconsiderable provocation was required to make Horace throw down his chisel and begin to talk when Nell was by. She used to say, "Now, Horace, if you stop working I shall go away at once."

From this it may be perceived that it had already come to be "Horace" and "Nell" between these young people. Yet Nell was not in love with him.

CHAPTER XVI.

INTRODUCES A NEW CHARACTER AND A NEW SCENE.

GOING one afternoon with a message from Mrs. Harte into the room where Horace worked, Nell's attention was arrested by a bust, newly begun, with which, however, he seemed to have made considerable advance in a short time. It was a man's portrait.

Nell had been absent from the studio for a day, and Horace had put this work in hand since she last visited his room. He had evidently commenced it with more than ordinary zest. Nell had never known him do so much in so short a time.

Horace worked with extraordinary rapidity when it pleased him, but his general habit was to loiter sadly over the early stages of a work.

An idea seized him. "A grand idea this. I never had such an idea before." He said this always, and added invariably, "But it must be allowed time to develop," which meant that Horace intended to idle for a fortnight before he so much as scrawled his idea upon paper or made the roughest of rough sketches in clay.

Here, however, he was already well forward with a work of which Nell had not even heard him speak.

The "roughing in" was done; the thing had, as it were, begun to live.

"What a splendid head!" was Nell's instant thought when she stood before it.

A bold, projecting forehead, the hair curling thick upon it. The eyebrows full and strong, with a deep, short line between them, which is generally a mark of thought. A straight nose, just a little arched, and the nostrils wide. At

the first glance the general expression was stern, but you looked again and saw that the curves of the mouth, half-hidden by the free and curling growth of hair on the upper lip, were singularly soft and sweet. The beard was close and crisp, and had a certain character, as most beards have upon which no razor has come.

All this was visible, though the portrait was not yet much more than a sketch.

Nell looked at it with something stronger than the interest of an artist.

She was looking at it still when Horace came in, with his sleeves put back for work.

"Ah! I thought we had lost you. Absent a whole day. Been making puddings for the professor?"

"Never mind the professor, Horace. Whose head is this?"

"A fine one, isn't it?"

"A noble one. Whose is it?"

"Lyne's."

"Who is Lyne?"

"Frank Lyne."

"Tiresome boy! Who is Frank Lyne?"

"A parson."

"Well, well, go on. What parson? How do you know him? and how do you come to be modelling him?"

Horace became serious. "Nell," he said, "that is the best parson in London. Don't you know him? Not even his name? But no—how should you? While we are muddling here with clay and stone, he is spending his days in missionary work in the East of London. And there's no playing at missionary there, I can tell you. That's none of your snug-smug work in the tropics, in a Panama hat and a pair of ducks. The East End heathen—well, they *are* heathen!"

"And does Mr. Lyne work amongst those people?"

"Day and night."

"How do you know him, Horace?"

"I know him better than any man living. I knew him before he turned parson. We lived abroad together. Some day I'll tell you his story."

"Why are you doing this?" and she pointed to the bust.

"Could I have a finer subject? I have been trying to get him to sit to me for a twelvemonth, but he wouldn't come. He knocked himself up a while ago, and had to lie by; that is how I have got hold of him at last."

"And is he sitting for this?"

"Pretending to; but he doesn't take to it kindly. He was here yesterday for half an hour, and is coming to-morrow. But he's just going back to work, and if I get half-a-dozen sittings out of him I shall be lucky."

Nell was a good deal in Horace's studio that day. The new bust had fascinated her. Her thoughts wandered from the bust to the man of whom Horace had spoken with an enthusiasm that was foreign to him.

"How old is Mr. Lyne, Horace?" she asked.

"Twenty-eight. What a lot of strength there is in those short curls on the forehead."

"Is the East End a long way from here, Horace?"

"Years—I mean miles. I don't think I've put enough expression into the nostrils."

She looked in just before she left in the evening. Horace was working with all his might, and with the steadfast expression on his face which only came there at times.

"Is the East End a dangerous place, Horace?"

"Not for such as Frank."

The next morning Horace was a little late in arriving at the studio. Nell, on the other hand, was there rather earlier than usual. She went straight to Horace's room. He had certainly worked longer than was his habit the day before; the bust had been greatly advanced.

"I should like to compare it with the original," said Nell to herself.

There was a step behind her. She turned. Francis Lyne stood in the doorway.

One thinks, in standing beside a great portrait work. "This is a grand performance, but the artist must have idealised his subject." It chances afterward, perhaps, that one has an opportunity of comparing the portrait and the original side by side, and then—let the work be from the chisel or brush of never so great a master—the thought is, "No; there is even something which the artist has not caught."

Nell had fancied that Horace, in his enthusiasm for his subject, might have been taking a little of the artist's license; but when Lyne stood in the doorway, she saw that she had been mistaken, and that there was no exaggeration—that, indeed, the living face was much the finer of the two.

"I beg your pardon," said the clergyman. "I thought that I should find Mr. Monteith here."

"I think he will be here immediately. He is generally here before this," answered Nell.

She had been mentally and almost unconsciously comparing the man with his portrait, and felt a sudden and indefinable pleasure in observing how far the reality surpassed the image. Horace was a fine artist, but there is in certain faces an inexplicable something which no painter or sculptor can reproduce. It is not in the features, and seems scarcely to be in the expression; but whatever it be, it is there, and Francis Lyne's was one of these faces.

He stood above the middle height, and his figure was strongly and handsomely built. His hair and beard were black-brown, and in the dark eyes was a quiet, steady look.

He seemed tired, and passed his hand over his forehead, which was pale.

"I am afraid I cannot wait," he said. "May I ask you to be so kind as to tell Mr. Monteith that I called?"

"But Horace—Mr. Monteith, I mean, will—will be very disappointed, I am sure," said Nell, in a diffident tone.

Just then the pallor in the clergyman's face increased, and, as if seized with sudden faintness, he caught for support at the pedestal on which the bust was standing.

"You are not well. I will get you a chair," said Nell, quickly.

She remembered that Horace had said his friend was just recovering from sickness.

"Thank you; you are very kind," he said when Nell returned a moment later. "I have not been long set free from a sick-room, and have probably walked too far this morning—the sun is hot."

In a few moments he was recovered. "Now I am ready to go," he said, and rose to his feet.

"Oh, no, you must not, it would not be wise; besides, I am sure that Horace—that Mr. Monteith will be here in a moment."

"I will wait, then, for a while, for indeed I believe that you are right. I am stronger sitting than standing," and he sat down again.

They did not find much to say. The clergyman's manner was reserved, and Nell on her part felt a kind of constraint. It seemed as though neither of them quite understood the other.

Nell was thinking of what Horace had said about his friend's work in the East End, and asking herself whether this were really the man. He looked rather the student than the practical missionary.

The clergyman was perhaps wondering who Nell might be, though he had only looked once at her, and had spoken no more than has been set down.

Presently his curiosity got the better of him, and he said, "Are you a sculptor, too?"

"I am only a pupil," answered Nell.

"Art is almost an unknown subject to me," said the clergyman.

Horace, with a cigarette between his fingers and a snatch of a song on his lips, entered the studio and greeted his friend.

Nell could not but wonder for an instant at the friendship between these two men. It was scarcely possible to suppose that they had a thought or wish in common, the one with his careless, light good-humour, and his air as if all life were a pastime and the world his playing-ground; the other with a purpose—and that a serious one—lined on his face, and a look of having taken a part of the world's burden on his shoulders and found it no trifle.

Nevertheless, no one who saw them grip hands could doubt that they were warm friends.

The sitting that morning was a brief one, and when Nell went into Horace's room at midday he was alone.

"Well," he said to her, "what do you think of him?"

"We hardly saw or spoke to one another," she answered.

"But you approve my choice of a subject?"

"He is too difficult, I think."

"Ha! But wait till I have finished."

"Horace, has Mr. Lyne a church?"

"Yes—in the wilderness."

"The wilderness?"

"The wilderness of the East."

"I should like to hear him preach."

"Good—you shall. We will go on Sunday morning. You shall see one of the queerest churches and the very queerest congregation in London. But you'd better take your smelling-salts."

"I have none."

"Then I must provide you."

At half-past ten on Sunday morning Horace was in waiting in Keppel Street with a hansom.

"Never mind your prayer-book," he said, as Nell was stowing that article in her pocket. "Frank is his own prayer-book."

The cab crossed the square and turned at a street parallel with Holborn. They drove at a rapid pace through a region which was new to Nell, and presently the driver pulled up at the top of a street, about which there were knots of people gathered, some of whom spoke a tongue which was easily recognisable for Italian.

"We are here in the home of the genii of the Neapolitan pianos," said Horace. "Almost all the gentlemen you see about you were princes or banditti in their own country."

He led the way down the street, which was steep and narrow, and full of a kind of squalid picturesqueness. At the bottom of the street rose a high, spare, brick building, which faced a long and tortuous alley, the houses or hovels on either side of which were in an advanced state of decay. The broken pavement was strewn with refuse of all sorts, and there were blotches of garbage at intervals of a few yards in the roadway, which sent up a dull sickening odour.

Amongst the whole of the houses there were not a dozen panes of glass; here and there the broken windows were stuffed with paper, but the weather being warm these contrivances were generally dispensed with, and the foul air

found a ready entrance through half a score of inlets. There were children playing in the gutters; one could not have told at a glance whether they were boys or girls—"Rags," says Victor Hugo, "have no sex." One who was familiar with the life of an obscure and fœtid by-way such as this would have known that it was Sunday, chiefly because there was more noise than usual, and because there were at least as many men as women lounging in the doorways.

A certain cleanliness and severity of aspect, apart altogether from its size, told that the building at the end of the alley had no connection with any of the surrounding houses. Hemmed in as it was on every side, it seemed to stand alone. Nor was there anything kindly or inviting in its look—a stern, bare place; one almost shivered in the sun at sight of it.

Nevertheless there were many people passing in at the doorway, and up the winding stone steps. A queer church, as Horace had said, and a queerer congregation.

They were all of one sex—either men or boys; there was not a girl or a woman amongst them.

Horace and Nell went up the steps, which led into a long, lofty room, at the upper end of which was a railed platform. The body of the room was filled with chairs, almost all of which were occupied; texts from Scripture bordered the platform and the walls.

Horace went up to the platform, and Nell followed him. Francis Lyne was there, alone; and he beckoned them to go up beside him.

One must have been very dull and passionless who did not experience a strange sensation in standing, for the first time, before such an audience as was gathered about that platform.

It was a rare showing up of the dark side of London life. Here were thrown together, in a mass of five or six hundred men and boys of all ages, the social dregs, the lees, the off-scourings, the *caput mortuum*, as one might say, of the Great City.

Wonderful, many-sided London! The gracious sun of that September Sunday flowed through the windows of many a goodly church and chapel, where people in comfortable clothing crowded the easy benches. It flooded the broad

parks, where people sat and strolled and were happy in its brightness and warmth. It streamed into dingy crooked lanes, and ugly by-ways, and teeming courts, and noisome overcrowded tenements; revealing human and other sores of the strangest and saddest kind—an ironic and yet not an unwelcome guest. It entered boldly into that long upper room where those six hundred were gathered, and laid bare their mean and faded state with an almost cruel distinctness.

There were men there who, a dozen years before, would have laughed or grown angry had one suggested that they might some day show a ragged coat and a haggard face on a bench in that room. There were tramps and thieves who had been "gentlemen;" lads, who had been taught to cadge and steal from the cradle, sitting beside men still in the prime of life who might have once thrown them a copper; graybeards, who knew the inside of every jail in the country; youngsters who had just "done" their first six-weeks on the treadmill, and might go back to it to-morrow; tradesmen who had failed; clerks who had swindled and been found out; common vagrants who spunged on all the world, and had a new lie for every week in the year—pariahs, outcasts, and outlaws, whose hand, like the hand of Ishmael, was against the world.

They had all washed their faces—a process which, in the cases of many, had brought out things that one would rather not have seen. On some faces there was crime, others showed mainly a hard indifference, as if the world had done its worst, and could do no more; but the dominant and prevalent look on the faces of the greater number was one of simple wretchedness. These were men who had gone to the wall in the general struggle of humanity; they had battled with Fortune, but she had been one too many for them, and they had thrown up the sponge. To almost every one of them might have been applied the death-word of the Roman amphitheatre—*Habet!*

What an audience for a preacher! The Church had surely lost her hold on these!

Some no sooner found a seat than they sank down and went heavily to sleep. The widest awake amongst them scanned the parson as if they were "prospecting" for the pocket in which he carried his loose cash.

The service was short and simple. There were prayers and a hymn, and Lyne read a psalm. Silence succeeded. As yet, no one in the congregation had shown any interest. Suddenly, out of the midst of the quiet, there arose the clear, bird-like voice of a girl, singing the loveliest of all sacred songs—"Oh rest in the Lord."

The effect was magical. Every head that had not fallen in sleep was lifted, and before a dozen notes had been sung, a lad sitting next to an old fellow whose slumber was almost death-like, shook him until he awoke, and, pointing to the singer on the platform, forced him to listen to the song.

Nell turned, for the voice came from the back of the platform, and saw a girl of about her own age, but smaller and slighter. Her face was rather pale, but full of a quiet beauty. She was handsomely but simply dressed, and had escaped notice by coming in quietly, after the service had commenced, through a door near the platform.

Before the song was finished the attention of every one was arrested.

Lyne went forward to the front of the platform, and looked down upon the people. A sort of rustle passed through their ranks, and into the dullest face came a look of expectation. They seemed to know him, one or two of them nudged each other and nodded.

To Nell, Lyne seemed a different man from what he had been in the studio. There was no constraint in his manner, and the expression on his face was that of one who felt himself to be thoroughly in his element. He had neither book nor notes in his hand, and there was nothing clerical in his style.

Bending down with his hands on the rail, and looking his audience full in the face, he began.

"Come, lads, put a heart into you; there's a meal in the bag yet; it's not too late for any one of you to pull himself together and try a new tack. Some of you here have been in one line of business long enough; you've given it a fair chance; stand still a minute and think what it's done for you. Let's give the trade its name, and call it stealing. It goes pretty well for a while, doesn't it? A quick turn-over, and decent profits, without much trouble; but a risky business at the best. Two or three days of luck, and a

month with no luck at all; and our friend with the handcuffs in his pocket always waiting round the corner, and after him the magistrate, and after him 'the mill.' And when you come out there's the whole business to begin over again; worse luck than ever this venture, perhaps; and 'five years' instead of 'six months' for the second time. Well, every man to his choice, but that wouldn't be the trade for my money. Come, look at it squarely—is the game worth the candle? Show me one man in a hundred who's made a fortune in the business! Look at yourselves; there isn't a decent coat among you, and your stomachs are empty."

Hunger indeed was written in livid characters on most of those faces, and when the parson talked of empty stomachs there were some who clutched at themselves with an action that was not pleasant to see.

There seemed something rough and almost cruel in this method of forcing home the truth, but Lyne went on again.

"I don't want to be down upon you. There are some here who know me, and know a good deal better than that. I want you to see that the old life's a poor one as well as a bad one; but I won't end by preaching. I'll put any man here who likes to try it in the way of a safer and better trade. I've done that by some who have been here before, and they've found the straight path easier than the crooked. I want you to do a stroke of honest work in the daylight! You will find it a great deal pleasanter than cadging in the dark. I want to put a little brag into you; I want you to pull yourselves together, and say you're as good as another man; but you can't do that while you slink about with one eye on the constable and the other on some one else's watch-pocket. A prig is only half a man, and he knows it. Do a single day's work of the right sort, and you'll have a feeling that never came along with the best 'take' you ever had."

At this point the preacher changed his tone, and turned for a few moments to his Bible. He read and expounded the parable of the vineyard, and opened up the moral side of the question in half-a-dozen simple sentences.

Then he turned to the second class of his hearers—the unfortunates, who had slipped down the ladder step by step, and were brought very near the gutter, but who had not yet turned rogues.

"You think that your backs are broken, and that you are played out," he said. "But straighten yourselves out, and have one more try; I'll do what I can to give you a lift."

The whole address did not occupy more than a quarter of an hour, and it was listened to from first to last.

The service over, the men still kept their places, and the hungry look on their faces, which had subsided for a few moments, came back, and all eyes were turned toward the door opposite the platform.

The door opened, and two or three men came in with baskets of bread and cans of hot cocoa.

A sort of gasp, which in wild beasts would have been a yell, was heard over the room. The food was served out, and the men fell to. In five minutes everything had disappeared—there was not a crumb or a drain remaining.

Then they began to get up and to move away. About half-a-dozen remained behind to see if Lyne had meant what he said, when he offered to put them on a new track; but the most of them having now got their bellies full thought they knew a trick worth two of that. The parable of the lepers does not belong entirely to antiquity.

"I am glad to see you," said Lyne, coming forward to shake hands with Nell. "It is good of you to come so far East on such a lovely day."

"I would have gone further on a much lovelier day to see what I have seen this morning," answered Nell.

"I am glad that you have been interested," he said. "I may perhaps venture to hope that you will come again. I like very much to have a woman's face on the platform; it does more good, I often think, than the words of a preacher."

"It was a strange congregation. Do you preach here every Sunday, Mr. Lyne?"

"No; there are others besides myself. But the service is held every Sunday morning. The cocoa-tins, you know, are a powerful magnet," he added, with a smile.

"Yes, and that is not wonderful," said Nell. "But they are not the only attraction, I am sure. See, there are some whom your words have touched; they are waiting to speak with you."

"There are two or three very old birds among them; I know what *their* song will be," said the clergyman. "But

I see three or four youngsters ; we shall try what we can do with them. You will come again, I hope?"

"I hope so," answered Nell, and they shook hands, and Lyne moved down the hall.

The girl who had sung so sweetly, and whose face had a charm which was only less moving than her voice, had left the room, after a brief word with Lyne. With her was an elderly woman in the dress of a Sister of Mercy. Nell had not spoken to the girl, but they had looked at one another in the way that girls look who are almost friends before a word has passed between them. Nell was certain that she knew the face, and wondered greatly where she had seen it before. Horace seemed scarcely less interested in the young singer, and looked after her as she went out with her companion.

"Thank you for bringing me here, Horace," said Nell, as they took their way homeward. "Let us come again. I should like to see some more of those people, and I like to hear Mr. Lyne talking to them."

"We'll come as often as you like, Nell. Didn't you like the singing? I should like to have thanked the singer, but the sister *duenna* was very wide awake, and didn't seem to think it necessary."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH NELL RECEIVES A SECOND PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE, AND HORACE TAKES A STUDIO.

It is not to be denied that Horace was lazy.

When he set his mind to work, it worked freely and without effort, and his fingers obeyed his brain with singular ease and rapidity. Young as he was, he was sufficiently master of his art to throw off the leading-strings of pupil, and begin to try his powers alone. For a long while, indeed, he had been a pupil only in name.

But his indolence prevented him from coveting independence, and a natural affectionateness of disposition made it hard for him to leave the master for whom he had a son's fondness.

Horace had ambition, but it was an intermittent flame and not a consuming fire.

Sometimes the Chief, who would rather have him stay, and yet wanted him to try his wings alone, used to say, "Horace, the end has come; if you don't go next week I'll turn you out bag and baggage;" and then they would laugh together until Mrs. Harte and Nell came out and abused them for a couple of frivolous children.

Nell used to chide Horace with great severity.

"You are a bad, idle fellow. You might do any work you pleased if you would go away and take a studio and set up for yourself."

But Horace had now another reason for not wanting to leave the studio in the Abbey. He did not like to go away from Nell.

It was a somewhat odd relation that had in a very brief

time grown up between them. They met every day as fellow-workers under the same roof. They saw each other, and heard each other's voices, and talked together, and laughed together; and twice a day at least they touched hands. They were of one age, and both were very handsome.

Of sentiment there had as yet been little between them —on Nell's part, none whatever. As for Horace, he hardly knew what his feelings were, but he did not hide from himself or from her that she was a great deal to him.

Horace's was a soft and clinging nature. Such a nature likes a stronger one to lean upon. Horace felt that he drew much strength from Nell; the moral atmosphere about her was racy, pungent, and invigorating; it was contagious, and to take it in was like inhaling a sea-breeze.

Though Horace made a show of treating lightly anything that savoured of counsel or admonition, he was never content until Nell had given him praise or blame; her praise made him prouder, her reproof quickened him. He began to wonder whether it would be possible for him to work alone without the stimulus of her voice and presence; and with this there grew up another feeling, and Horace asked himself whether he were in love. The matter was brought to an issue.

They were talking on the old subject — Horace's backwardness in taking the first step.

"Are you a man?" began Nell, severely.

"A semblance only—a walking shadow," he answered, with an air of contrition.

"You have the whole world before you!"

"Shakespeare, I think, has called it an oyster."

"Yes, and would have bade you with your chisel open it."

"The line does truly smack of the bard. It is almost blank verse, Nell."

"You are flippant, sir. Now, if *I* were in a position to face the world——"

"It is a fearful monster to face, Nelly. I knew a man——"

"Never mind the man. Horace, you must and shall face the world!"

"Don't force it on me in that tremendous way, Nell. Think of my years. I am but a child—a suckling."

"Stuff! You are as old as I am. *I'm* not a bit afraid of the world."

"This is indeed sublime! Why was I not born with a woman's spirit?"

"Horace, that is nonsense. You have spirit enough of your own if you would only rouse it and give it play."

"Play! Ah, there's the rub, Nell. I'm an idle dog."

"Yes; but if I could make you really feel that, and be ashamed of it, you would be idle no longer. Dear Horace, I do want you to work, and work hard—oh, so hard! You may do anything you like in your art, if you will only work; Mr. Harte says so, and the critic who came here the other day said that your statue would be the best thing in the next Academy. You *will* work, Horace, won't you?"

"Nell," he said, "there are men who can work alone, without praise, without success even, with no stimulus but the love of the work itself. I am not one of those men, though my art is very dear to me. I work better always when you are near me. When I go from here, we shall be separated."

"No, Horace, not at all. We shall not see one another every day, but we shall meet very often, I hope."

"It won't be the same thing, Nell. Can't we—can't we make it so that there need be no separation at all?"

"In what way, Horace?"

"There is but one way, Nell."

He had dropped his chisel, and taken her hands in his, and they stood looking into one another's eyes. She did not withdraw her hands, but she said:

"N—no, Horace. Let us not do that."

Such refusal does but whet a man's desire, and Horace's tone deepened.

"I cannot go away from you, Nell. I love you."

Nell, still leaving her hands in his, looked at him very frankly, and her eyes and lips both smiled together as she answered:

"No, Horace, dear, you don't."

"But, Nell, I do; I swear it."

"Tut! You are not the lover a bit," she laughed. "Your voice doesn't tremble, your eyes don't melt—they

don't even roll; you stand quite firm—you don't shake in the least."

"But I can do all that, Nell."

"Yes, when I've prompted you! No, Horace, let us not be foolish. Let us be very wise. I am very fond of you, Horace, and so are you of me; but we are not meant to love one another as lovers. We are chums, Horace, you and I. It is a very nice relation; don't let us spoil it. There, we will kiss once, if you like; and now let us talk no more of love."

And somehow or other, when they had, in simple gentle fashion, touched each other's cheeks with their lips, Horace felt that Nell was in the right, and that there was an end of lovers' love between them.

"And now, Horace," she said, "I am going to send you away. You are going to take your own studio, and begin to work very hard on your own account. We will go this afternoon, and take the studio that we saw the other day in Little Holland Road."

They went, and the studio was engaged; and Horace moved in and settled down.

"I'm going to be horribly lonely, Nell," he said.

"Oh, no, you're not. You're going to be busy all the while. You will have to get through a certain quantity every week, and I shall come and see that you do it."

"You'll be certain to come, Nell?"

"Of course I shall. Do you think that we are going to lose sight of one another? It is only five minutes' run from one studio to the other."

In all the while that they had been together, Horace had never spoken to Nell of his own family. She knew that he had neither father nor mother, but he had never mentioned a sister, a brother, or a relative of any description. Since the interview just related, they had been drawn together more closely than ever, and on the Sunday following, they were sitting under the trees in Kensington Gardens, when Nell said:

"Horace, I have told you my story; tell me yours."

"Story, God bless you, miss!——"

"Thank you, Horace, I have heard that opening before. You must be more original."

"Very well; in what style will you have it?"

"In the natural style, if you please."

"Very good; I prefer that style myself. It was a pleasant evening in the month of May. The young lambs——"

"Horace, have you, or have you not, a story to tell, and will you tell it properly? If you don't begin at once, I shall go to church; and you can't pay for your chair, if I leave you, because you haven't got your purse. Now, am I to go?"

"No; sit down, Nell, and I'll tell you the story. It has the double advantage of being short and unsensational. You will not be called on to exhibit any kind of emotion during the relation. To begin—you know that I have neither father nor mother. Worse than that, I have no remembrance of either of them. My father, when a young man, fell in love with an artist. She had great talent, as you will say when I have shown you some drawings of hers, which are the only relics that I possess. But my grandfather, who was a country squire, thought the match not good enough for his only son, and forbade it. Other grandfathers have shown a similar obtuseness, so I won't abuse the memory of mine. They were married secretly, and myself and a twin sister were born. The marriage having been clandestine, it was of course necessary to keep us twins from obtruding on the notice of grandpapa. The double event, as there was afterward reason to think, threw my mother out in the plans she had made for a temporary concealment. I was placed in the keeping of the wife of my father's valet, my sister was bestowed elsewhere. At this time, my father, being in delicate health, was sent by the family doctor to the north of Italy. My mother, of course, followed him, and as a pilgrimage to Rome had been one of her dreams, they went straight there instead of to the north. It was the worst place they could have gone to, for the summer heats were in full blast. My father took the fever, and was dead in three weeks from the date that he left England; my mother died from the same cause a few days after him. My grandfather went to Italy immediately on hearing of my father's death, and there found papers relating to the marriage and the births. Grief softened the old gentleman, and his first question was: 'Where are the

children, for they are mine now?' The valet, who had gone with my father to Italy, said that his wife had the keeping of me, but he knew nothing of my twin sister. My grandfather returned to England, where I was at once handed over to him. He searched for my sister to the day of his death, but she was never found. I have searched for her ever since, but have not found her. I have two serious purposes in life, Nell—to succeed as an artist (don't laugh at that), and to find my sister."

"Have you not even heard of her, Horace?"

"Not one word. The valet's wife could not take the two of us; in fact, she has left it on record that I was burden enough for three nurses. My sister, it was thought, had been placed in the care of an old friend or confidential servant of my mother; but that is only a guess, for not the ghost of a clue has ever come into my hands. But I shall find her, Nell—don't you think I shall?"

"Yes, Horace; and I hope so, too."

"You shall help me, now, Nell; we will search together, eh?"

"Yes, Horace, we will."

"And, Nell, we'll go to Frank Lyne's place again, next Sunday. You'd like to go again, wouldn't you?"

"Very much."

"Didn't you say that you thought you knew the face of the girl who sang?"

"I'm sure I do; but I can't remember where I have seen it before."

"She sang divinely, didn't she, Nell?"

"Yes, Horace."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN OLD LOVER.

THEY did go to "Lyne's place" on the following Sunday, and found Lyne himself leading his forlorn hope with the same quiet confidence as before.

To Nell the service was as interesting as ever. She recognised many of the ragged listeners, who had brought their tatters, their gaunt forms, and grim hunger-bitten features there again; and more than once she found herself wondering how the days had passed with them since the Sunday before; what roof or archway had sheltered them at night; what food they had eaten; what new hope or deeper misery the seven days had brought to them.

It was curious to note the change in some of the faces. This one, whose aspect was so hopeless the Sunday before, had a brighter eye; he had had a stroke of luck; had got a sovereign, perhaps, tied up somewhere about him, and was simmering over the prospect of a "drunk" for every night of the coming week. He didn't follow the parson quite so closely as last Sunday; thought the old game wasn't quite played out yet.

The fellow next him, who was so perky last week, had had his head against the wall since then; and when Lyne called on them, as before, to give one more chance to honesty, he sat there pulling a frowsy lock, with a doubtful look on his face, wondering whether, after all, the dark game *was* worth the candle.

Horace, on his part, did not show quite the interest that he had done on the previous Sunday. Why, I cannot say, but may add in parenthesis that the girl who had sung from Mendelssohn was not there on that day. Lyne was

evidently much gratified to see Nell at his service again so soon. In spite of his strong handsome presence, there was a good deal of natural shyness about Lyne, when he was not talking to his backsliders, but his shyness added rather a pleasant touch to his manner, which was singularly free from any sort of affectation.

"This is kind of you," he said to Nell, when the service was over.

"There is no kindness in it at all," she replied. "I am very much interested. I have seen a new world since I came here. I should like to see more of these people."

"I should like to be your guide."

"It is hard, labouring here?"

"Well, yes—it seems to me rather like trying to blow down a fortress with a peashooter."

"The walls of Jericho fell before a less warlike instrument than that," said Nell.

"Y—yes. I have often wished that I had some of the lung-power of Joshua and his friends. I have wondered, too, how long they would have blown their trumpets before they reduced the walls of outcast London."

"What is your hope in this work?" asked Nell.

"I have a good many hopes, but you will think them rather vague. I want, by putting a few right notions into these men's minds, to make them take a common-sense view of good and bad. The dominant idea with them, though they may never have put it into grammatical shape, is that things are wrong outside of their world. I want to strengthen them in that idea, and then show them that there is a right way and a wrong way, a practicable and an impracticable way of setting things straight. As a man and a clergyman, I have endless sympathies with these people. Some of them know it, and that is why they listen to me. I keep the parson out of sight as much as possible. The closer I can get to them the more I hope to lift them out of themselves, and make them try at any rate to struggle on to higher ground."

"I see nothing so vague in these hopes," said Nell, "and I do wish that you may succeed in your work."

"Thank you. Your words give me a foretaste of success already."

Then they said good-bye, and shook hands again ; and for the second time Nell was compelled to observe within herself that the young clergyman had a strong hand, and gripped firmly; and the parson, for the second time, was bound to notice that Nell had singularly fine eyes, and a sweet and sympathetic mouth.

Horace and Nell went home by the underground railway. They faced one another in the carriage, and both were silent.

"What are you thinking about, Nell?" asked Horace.

"I am thinking that missionary work in the east of London is a grand thing—what are you thinking about, Horace?"

"I am thinking that a service like that is all the better for a little good music. The singing to-day was uncommonly poor."

Nell got out at Gower Street, leaving Horace to proceed to Kensington. She had scarcely set foot on the platform, when she felt a hand on her arm, and heard a very familiar voice at her ear.

"What, Nell—is it you?"

"Good gracious, Martin!"

The train rolled out of the station, but not until Martin and Horace had looked for a moment into each other's faces.

Martin's look, translated into speech, meant, "There's a darned swell for you!"

Horace's said:

"The style of our friend is unquestionably rustic."

"Good gracious, Martin!" repeated Nell, "is it really you?"

"Well, yes, Nell, I expect it is. Ain't you glad to see me?"

"Of course I am; ever so glad. How funny you look, Martin!"

I don't quite think Nell should have said that, because the truth was, Martin did look funny. His costume was an odd mixture of town and country. He seemed, in putting it on, to have started with the notion that it would not do to go to London like a countryman, and his hat, coat, and necktie were brand-new, and within three or four years of the fashion. But, having got so far, it appeared to have

struck him that an entire suit of finery might be thrown away on the Londoners, and he had accordingly compromised the matter by retaining the breeches, gaiters, and boots in which he was accustomed to discharge the duties of the farm.

But that he could look "funny" in this, or, for the matter of that, in any conceivable costume, was a notion quite foreign to the mind of Martin, and Nell's little pleasantry jarred upon his sensibilities.

"Well, if you come to that, Nell, I don't see anything so precious funny about it. But we can't *all* be swells, you see. There's some, I shouldn't wonder, that don't think of much else except the clothes they put on their backs." (Martin had given a good deal of thought to that costume of his.)

"Well, don't be angry, Martin. I didn't mean that your clothes weren't nice. I think they're very original. But have you no news to tell me? Only to think of our meeting here! What brings you to town? How long have you been here? Why haven't you been to see me?"

"Easy there, Nell. Lord! what a place this London is to make folks talk. I've heard more jabber here in twenty-four hours than I should do in twice as many weeks at home."

"And wouldn't you have me talk to you, you ungrateful fellow, after all these weeks that we haven't seen one another? I've a great mind to put you into the next train that comes up, and send you away into the tunnel by yourself."

"No, don't do that, anyway, Nell. It's bad enough to lose yourself in broad daylight in the streets. Let's get up out of here; I'm 'most stifled. My, Nell! you're the fine lady from your bonnet to your boots," he exclaimed, surveying her admiringly, and yet in something of jealousy, when they stood in the street.

"Do you like me, Martin?"

"A man couldn't do else that had eyes in his head, Nell."

"Thank you, Martin; that's very pretty indeed. You see, you are finding your tongue already. And now, tell me what has brought you to town."

"Oh, things, Nell, things."

"Things! There's an answer from one Christian to another! What sort of things?"

"Oh, beasts, Nell, and pigs, and such like."

"And how long are you going to stay?"

"A goodish piece, maybe."

"Well, and how are all the people at home, Martin? How is Mr. Meadowsweet?"

"Looks a bit seedier about the elbows than he used to, and has got a bit balder. Goodey Twemley says he's the baldest man she ever saw."

"Well, he's none the worse for that, if it doesn't give him cold. Have you brought me no message from him, Martin?"

"Why, yes, now I think of it, there's a letter for you somewhere."

"There! I don't believe you'd ever have remembered it."

"You're in a mighty hurry to get it, Nell."

"Of course I am; he hasn't written to me for a month."

"Well, 'tis here," said Martin, after standing still while he turned his principal pockets inside out, and produced a crumpled envelope, which Nell at once transferred to her own pocket.

"What are we stopping for?" asked Martin, when they had reached the house in Keppel Street.

"This is where I live, Martin."

"What! D'ye mean to say that you live in a house with steps to it?"

As it wanted yet half an hour to the early Sunday dinner, the drawing-room was deserted, and there Nell took her visitor, whom, in her capacity of housekeeper, she had invited to stay for the rest of the day.

Seated on one of the drawing-room chairs, Martin began to be ill at ease, and eyed with a dubious air the gaiters and boots, which he now heartily wished that he had left at home. To him, the shabby rep furniture, the carpet, with its staring flower pattern, the mirror over the mantel-piece, in a faded gilt frame, the wax flowers under glass cases, and the portrait in oils of Miss Gripp's grandpapa, with white hair and a pinkish nose, were so many evidences of unbounded luxury.

Nevertheless, as a landed proprietor, and the possessor

of at least fifty shillings' worth of chromos in his best parlour, he felt that it would not do to exhibit too much enthusiasm. Accordingly, when Nell asked him what he thought of her new home, he passed but a qualified approval, and proceeded to a depreciatory valuation of Miss Gripp's grandpapa and the wall-paper.

It had struck Nell from the moment of their meeting that Martin had something on his mind of which he was anxious to disburden himself.

He approached at last, in a somewhat lumbering fashion, the point toward which she had feared that his conversation was tending.

"You're not getting tired of it, Nell, eh?" he said, with his eyes fixed on old Mr. Gripp.

"Of that?" answered Nell, nodding in the direction of the portrait.

"Lord, no! What a one you are to tease, Nell. I mean, you're not getting tired of this London life?"

"Oh, Martin, no. How could I?"

"Don't think at all about going back to the old place?"

"N—no, Martin, not at all."

"Ah!" said Martin slowly, and looked in a not-too-kindly manner at old Mr. Gripp, who beamed on him in return with senile good-humour.

The first dinner-bell rang, and the boarders came trooping in. Martin's disquietude returned.

"Nell," he whispered, as they were going in to dinner, "they're all right, these Americans, aren't they? Only a sort of English, after all, I suppose? They—they don't speak a foreign tongue, do they?"

For a while Nell had not much more conversation with Martin. His words referring to herself had given her an uncomfortable feeling. What was he doing in London? He had answered her vaguely; she wondered whether he had told her his full purpose. How long would he stay? Why had he asked her if she were tired of her new life, and whether she had ever thought of going back to the old? Surely Martin must know that everything but friendship was at an end between them.

She tried to get near him after dinner, to talk with him more fully, and to show him how impossible it was that she

should change, or even think of changing, the new life for the old.

But after dinner Martin fell into the hands of Mr. Claypole, who took possession of him in the hope that he might prove more conversational in a quiet corner of the drawing-room than he had done under the general gaze of the boarders at the dinner-table. When Mr. Claypole took out his note-book, Nell knew that her chance was gone.

"If you'll be so good as wait, sir, I'll jest make a note of that observation," said Mr. Claypole; and for an hour or so from that time he was occupied in noting down Martin's opinions on matters bucolic and agrarian, from the breeding of cattle and the rearing of poultry to local taxation and the land question.

Once Martin looked round at Nell, with something between a scowl and an entreaty on his face, and she got up to go to his assistance. But at that instant Mr. Claypole took up his pencil again.

"You have given me, sir," he said, "a great deal of valooable material. I'd jest like to cull a few notions from you on the commercial prospects of the British pig."

Martin muttered something under his breath which, judging by his expression, could scarcely have been complimentary either to the British pig or to Mr. Claypole; and Nell, thinking that he had been sufficiently victimised, went to his rescue.

"This is a queer kind of place you've got into, Nell," said Martin, when he was saying good-night at the door, in none too amiable a mood.

"Yes, but don't you think it's rather an interesting place, Martin?"

"I don't know so much about that, either. They're a rum lot, I call them."

"They are very nice people, Martin; you don't quite understand them, perhaps."

"Maybe I don't. But, Nell, who was that dandy gentleman in the train with you?"

"That was Mr. Monteith, Martin, a friend of mine."

"Monteith—a fine name, and a fine gentleman owning it; eh, Nell?"

"You don't speak kindly, Martin. I might say that you

have no right to talk in that way of any friends of mine, but I do not wish to quarrel."

"I don't like all these fine fellows about you, then, Nell—there," he said, beating the step with his foot.

"I have none such about me, Martin, nor am ever likely to have. If you stay here long enough I hope that you will know them better."

"I don't want to know any such as those," he said, sulkily.

"Martin," said Nell, in a gentle tone, "you are behaving and talking foolishly. What has made you angry?"

"Well, see here, Nell," he brought out angrily; "I don't like to be left out in the cold. I've got a better claim on you than any of these; and I want *my* finger in the pie again. There!"

"If you mean me by the pie, Martin, you are not polite. As for the rest, I don't know one bit what you mean. I was delighted to see you, and surely I have done nothing to offend you since this morning?"

For a moment Martin did not answer, but his face showed that a strong passion within was trying to find utterance in words. Then he went close to her and took her hand and held it tightly, and said, "Nell, Nell, I'm in love the same as ever—more than ever, Nell. Will you let me speak to you of that?"

"No, Martin, no," she said, quietly, but with evident pain; "you must not speak of that. There cannot be anything but friendship between us. Please, Martin, please, speak to me of this no more."

"Ay, but I will, Nell, for I must," he said. "If I can't have you, there's none that shall. I'm near you now again, and I'm going to stay!"

"Is this meant for a threat, Martin?" said Nell.

"Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't—there's your answer, Nell," and Martin went out into the street.

CHAPTER XIX.

TWO GIRLS.

In the quiet of her room, at the top of the house, Nell sat —alone, and not alone, for she had the companionship of troubled thoughts.

Her mind went back over the past, and she recalled another meeting with Martin in which—then for the first time—he had given her a little glimpse of the cloven hoof.

She remembered the strong sense of revulsion that had come over her at that time; how, for a moment, she had shrunk from Martin, and despised and almost hated him. She remembered thinking what an ugly thing was the passion of a man, and a dangerous thing, and a thing to be dreaded; and then she remembered how, after awhile, her feelings had changed, and she had been almost angry with herself for thinking so hardly of Martin, her childhood's playmate, her girlhood's lover; and she recalled the thrill of pleasure that had taken her when Martin had run to meet her at the last, begging to be friends again, and how gladly she had touched his hand, just as the train was carrying her away.

Her mind glanced swiftly then over the time that had elapsed since she came to London. During the last month or two her old life had been little more than a dream. It had been a very pleasant dream, full of the scent of fields and flowers, and the salt breeze of the sea, and the soft breath of the wind, and an old woman's love, and an old man's friendship—but a dream for all that; and the new life seemed so real.

She had tasted the pleasures of art, and the taste was

very sweet. She was just beginning, as it were, to stand upright and alone, to use her own powers, to feel within her the dawn of the creative faculty; she had begun to climb Parnassus, and could not stay her steps.

Just now, too, there had been opened another interest in her life.

She recalled her introduction to Lyne, and made no effort to hide from herself the interest which she felt in him and in his work, in the strange unknown world of East London.

Her ambitions were now a part of herself, and—for ambition is not food enough for such a woman as Nell—so were her new friendships, and all those vague and tender feelings that had lately sprung within her.

The appearance of Martin, his renewed assertion of his love, his angry declamation, and his threats, went far to dissipate her happy present and her hopeful future. Nell knew her old lover pretty well by this time; the reserve of sullenness in his nature, his dogged adherence to a purpose, his capacity for nourishing a fancied grudge—and she made no doubt that Martin could be a very troublous person, if it pleased him to give play to his worser side.

Her brain was still busied with uneasy thoughts when she remembered the letter which Martin had given her from the Vicar, and taking it from her pocket she opened and read it.

One passage fixed her attention more than the rest.

"Our ambiguous friend at the farm over there," wrote the Vicar, "has given me a good deal of his company since you left. At first I was at a loss to account for the frequency of his visits, for my knowledge of agricultural matters is mainly derived from handbooks. But I soon found that Clymo did not come to consult me about the farm. He had in his mind's eye a topic more attractive than that. He came, my dear, on your account. I learned that he still had absurd notions concerning what he called his claim on your affections. In vain I reasoned with him. I said that the hands which he thought fit only to milk his preposterous cows were even now wielding the chisel of Phidias and Praxiteles. He did not understand me in the least, and went so far as to ask what I was talking about. I ceased forthwith. Should I cast my pearls of argument

before one who affects to value a two-and-tenpenny Oleo above a well-authenticated Douw? Be it far from me. Yet he was not satisfied. He came one day and said that he had made up his mind to go to London. I asked him with whom he intended to leave those few sheep in the wilderness, and he said that his brother would manage it in his absence. I inquired what he proposed to do in London, and he replied that he had 'some commission work at the cattle market' for several farmers round here, and would probably be in town for some time. I would have argued with him again, but did not, remembering that there are strict injunctions in Scripture against reasoning with a fool in his folly. He has now actually gone, carrying this letter in his pocket; and as I fear, with an eye rather to Bloomsbury than to the cattle market. Do unto him what seemeth best unto you, but be not over-kind. There are a few roses still blooming in the nook by the summer-house."

"Cattle market, indeed!" thought Nell. "I know the cattle Martin comes after." And the Vicar's letter made her more uneasy than ever.

She had it in mind all the next day, until she left the studio, which she did a little earlier than usual. It chanced that she was in no hurry to return home that afternoon, for all the boarders had gone to the Stoke Pogis churchyard, to sit on the tombstone where Gray did, or did not, compose the "Elegy"; and there was to be no late dinner. She took her way to the Park, intending to loiter a while under the trees before she went home.

It was the latter end of September, a very beautiful month that year, soft and fragrant almost as the "Indian summer" of America. The London parks fade very rapidly in autumn, but the summer just ended had been a moist one, and the leaves had kept their freshness, and under the trees the grass had lost but little of its glow. Nell was walking and thinking alone; stopping now and then to look at the distant sheet of water glancing in the sun; gathering a morsel of warm sweet moss at the root of a tree, or picking up and letting slip through her fingers a handful of fallen leaves; when the faint sound of a church-bell fell upon her ear. It turned her thoughts into a different channel, recalling the queer services she had lately seen in that desolate slum in the City, and the young girl who had sung

so sweetly at the first of them. Then the bell, still ringing on the outskirts of the Park, brought up other and earlier associations, and on a sudden she remembered what she had been trying to remember for a week past—where it was that she had first seen that singer's face.

"It was at the church in Brompton," she said to herself.

In her wanderings, when she first came to town, she had found a fine old church in Brompton where there was a musical service every evening at five. It stood in its own grounds, with trees shading the paths, and seats under them. The church door was always open, and Nell had turned in there sometimes, interested in the music and the worshippers, and in the Sisters of the sisterhood attached to the church, who moved about so quietly in their black gowns, placing flowers on the altar and the font.

As it wanted yet a few minutes to five, she left the Park by one of the Kensington gates, and went down the broad road leading past the Museum, and on till she came to the church. The service was just commencing, and Nell took the seat where she had sat before.

The long shadowy aisles were flooded with the music of the organ, and the stained-glass windows glowed in the evening sun with a subdued and mellow beauty.

Nell had scarcely seated herself before a girl entered the church and went softly between the rows of chairs, and took the one next to her. She turned, and recognised the singer at Lyne's service. It was the girl whom she had seen first in this same place. They had sat beside one another, and Nell had listened with delight to the voice which always sang the service with such sincerity and charm. A look of recognition, a smile, and an unspoken greeting passed between them; but that was all for the present. When the service was over, Nell turned and said, "I think we have met here before."

"Yes, and in another place," answered the girl.

"Do you come here often?" asked Nell.

"Almost every evening, and sometimes twice a day."

"Then you are fond of the service?"

"Yes; and besides that, I seem somehow to belong to the church. I live with the Sisters who are attached to it."

"Oh, do you?" exclaimed Nell. "I like to watch the Sisters when I come here. I think theirs must be a beautiful life; and yet I am afraid I shouldn't like it for myself; it seems so still and so remote."

"I suppose it is remote," said the singer; "at least, I think I know what you mean by that. But I don't think it is still. They are so busy every day. You would never guess all the work they do; and they are so good and kind. Oh! it is delightful to live with them!"

"Shall you become one of them?" asked Nell.

"Oh, no. I only live with them. I have no friends in England. I came here from a sisterhood in France. My guardian lives in France; it was he who sent me here."

"And shall you go back to France?"

"No, I think not—I hope not. Not if I can succeed in my profession."

"I can guess your profession, I think," said Nell.

"Can you? What is it?"

"It is music; is it not?"

"Yes. How did you know that?"

"How should I not, after hearing you sing?

"You are very kind," said the girl, flushing with pleasure.

"You are an artist, then," said Nell. "That is another reason why we should be friends, for I am an artist, too. At least, I am trying to be one."

"Are you really? And is your art music?"

"No; I am learning to be a sculptor."

"Oh, how grand that sounds! That must be ever so much more difficult than music."

Nell laughed, and said she thought not. By this time all the people had left the church, and the two girls were standing together in the aisle—a very pretty pair. Nell was taller and of a fuller form than her companion, who was a little below the medium height, slight and very graceful, with hair many shades lighter than Nell's, and gray eyes, and small white hands with the lithe, nervous fingers of a musician.

"Do you live near this?" she inquired of Nell.

"No, I live in Bloomsbury."

"Bloomsbury? Is that a long way off?"

"Three miles or more, I dare say."

"And you come and go all that distance alone?"

"Oh, yes," laughed Nell. "I come nearly this distance every day."

"And aren't you a bit afraid to go about the streets by yourself?"

"Oh my, no! Are you?"

"I scarcely ever go alone. The Sisters don't like it. I went into the Park once, though, but I lost my way, and a policeman brought me home."

"I should have got into a hansom," said Nell, with the superior air of a young person who had ridden in such a vehicle once in her life.

"Should you?" said the other admiringly. "I never thought of that."

"I suppose you and the Sisters live near the church?" said Nell presently.

"Oh yes, quite close. Will you come home with me?"

"I should like to," said Nell, "but——" She looked at her watch; it was a quarter to six.

"It is such a very little way," said her friend. "Do come."

"I will come if I may go away in half an hour. Miss Gripp takes her medicine at half-past seven, and I must be there to pour it out for her. It is homœopathic, and goes by drops, you know. It is three drops for Miss Gripp's complaint, and if she were to take five by mistake, I don't know what would happen."

"Is she very ill? What is her complaint?"

"I'm not quite sure what it is this week," said Nell.

And then, of course, Nell had to say who Miss Gripp was, and from Miss Gripp she went to Joe, and from him to the professor, and from him to Mr. Claypole and Miss M'Gee, and so on until she had enumerated and described all the inmates of the boarding-house; at which relation her friend opened her eyes wide, and evidently thought that Nell was a very clever and wonderful person to have the principal part of the management of such a very remarkable establishment.

"What a great deal you must know about people, and —and things; and what a lot of the world you must have

seen!" she said. At which Nell laughed heartily, and told her that it was but a few months since she had left a tiny old-world village in the North of England, where nobody ever came and nothing ever happened. And this naturally aroused more curiosity on the part of her friend, which led to a complete narration by Nell of the circumstances that had induced her to leave the village, and of her adventures since she came to town, ending with her engagement as Mr. Julian Harte's pupil.

And before this was finished they had reached the convent. Its high gray walls, more than half clothed in ivy, towered above the surrounding houses; and the outer wall, which enclosed and shut it off from the rest of the world, was old and solid. The roof of the house was pointed and gabled, and the windows long, narrow, and latticed. Within the boundary wall was a wide old-fashioned garden, with a sloping terrace, lawn, old trees, and paths, and many shaded corners with ample rustic seats.

A good many of the Sisters were about the garden, which Nell beheld with covetous eyes; but her companion went on into the house, and up a broad staircase with oaken rails, and into a long, dim corridor, with little doors on either side.

At one of these Nell's companion stopped, and opened it.

"Oh, what a lovely little room!" exclaimed Nell.

It was just big enough to be the boudoir of one small lady—about twelve feet long by twelve feet wide. The walls were tinted a pale gray-green. There was an Indian matting on the floor, with a couple of skin rugs thrown over it, and all the furniture was of the most delicate description. In the window, which gave a full view of the garden, was a tall stand of flowers, and the largest object in the room was a miniature piano, which stood open, and was strewn with music.

Nell thought, with a momentary pang, of her own dingy room in Keppel Street, with its barren window and meagre furniture; but was happy the next moment in the thought that any one should live in such a pretty place as this.

The two girls, between whom it had been an affair of friendship at first sight, soon became confidential, and talked to one another about the people they knew, and

about their own small existences, and all that they wanted to do, and how they supposed that they would never be able to do it.

The name of the young singer was Mabel Fawcett. She was nearly two years younger than Nell, and the story which she told her was a very simple one. Like Nell, she had never known either father or mother, and had very little knowledge of the guardian on whom she had been dependent from her childhood. "He shut himself up," she said, "in a lonely house in Normandy, where he did scientific experiments all day, and scarcely ever went out or saw anybody."

He had placed her, when quite a child, in the care of a Protestant sisterhood near Paris, and it was there that she developed a love of music, which became so strong that the Sister Superior persuaded her guardian to let her go to London, that she might study in a proper manner at the Academy.

So he sent her to London, and, on the recommendation of the French Sister, to the sisterhood connected with the church of St. Mary, in Brompton, with whom she had now been living for about three and a half years.

"So you are, like me, without father or mother; that is another reason why we should be friends," said Nell; and then she went on to tell how she had gone to St. Mary's that evening on purpose to see Mabel, who, in her turn, said that she had wanted to meet Nell again ever since she had seen her at Mr. Lyne's service.

"Now you will sing something for me, please, before I go," said Nell; and Mabel placed herself at the piano, and, touching the keys softly, began to sing an old German air.

Nell sat in the window, with her head thrown back and her hands clasped in front of her, listening intently to the dream-like melody, and enjoying the lovely face of the singer, and the stillness of the room, and the sombre twilight beauty of the garden beyond.

"Thank you, thank you," said Nell. "Sing to me again—but no, don't, or I shall stay here all the evening. I must really go."

"If you must, I will let you," said the other; "but only on condition that you come again soon."

"I shall surely do that," answered Nell.

Then they went along the corridor and down the stairs, and said good-bye at the wicket.

"Do you know Mr. Lyne well?" asked Nell, as she stood to let her friend fasten a flower in her dress.

"No, hardly at all," answered Mabel. "He visits here now and then, and that is how I came to be introduced to him. He asked me to sing at his service, and I went. But he has not spoken much to me—he is so quiet."

"I like to hear him preach," said Nell.

"So do I. Was that your brother who went with you? Oh no, I forgot," she added rather hastily, "you have no brother."

"That was Horace," laughed Nell. "We were pupils in the same studio; but Horace is a long way ahead of me, and now he has a studio of his own. He often talks about you."

"About me?" said Mabel, getting very red, and opening her eyes wide.

"Well, about your singing. He thinks you sing divinely."

"His eyes have the look of yours," said Mabel. Which shows that she had observed the eyes of Horace, as well as the eyes of Nell.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BOARDING-HOUSE DISAPPEARS.

THERE was a surprise awaiting Nell when she reached home that evening. Miss Gripp, having resolved upon a new departure in the existence of herself and her brother, had, on the strength of that resolve, retired to bed an hour earlier than usual; and showed a communicative countenance over the counterpane when Nell went in to administer her medicine.

"Be seated, Miss Haffenden," she said; and Nell, perceiving that the occasion was momentous, shifted Teresa's garments unceremoniously from the chair that was nearest to the bed, and sat down.

"Hadn't you better take your medicine first?" said she; but Teresa, primed with news, rose superior to medicinal supports, and waved the suggestion aside.

"Miss Haffenden," said she, "I think it proper to acquaint you, at the earliest possible moment, that I have decided to break up my boarding-house;" and having delivered herself of this startling intelligence, she sank back and took a promiscuous draught from the vial that was nearest to hand.

"Break up the boarding-house, Miss Gripp—'Gripp's Anglo-American Boarding-house'? Why, what will become of us all?"

"Miss Haffenden," replied Teresa, a pinkish tinge overspreading her features, for she had taken the wrong bottle, "there is a Providence above—be kind enough to reach me the other draught."

"But we can't use Providence like a workhouse, Miss Gripp," observed Nell, dubiously.

"We shall not do so, Miss Haffenden; but you must allow me to repeat that there *is* a Providence, for the thought has sustained me amid trials, which, had I not been possessed of that conviction, I should often have found it difficult to bear." And having to her own satisfaction vindicated the existence of Providence, Miss Gripp assumed a more colloquial style, and went on:

"You know, my dear, I have told you over and over again, that the boarding-house does not pay. You have seen that, for yourself, while you have been keeping the accounts. We have certainly done better while you have been in charge than we ever did while my poor brother had the management; but this has been one of the worst seasons we have known—not a single fresh boarder since you came to us—and you know as well I do that we have hardly covered expenses."

"But the next season may be a much better one, Miss Gripp."

"No, it won't. The connection seems to be played out. In the old days those who went away recommended others; they don't do that now, and the present generation of American tourists appear to me to have larger appetites than the last, and they won't pay any more. With meat at the price it is, the dinners can't be done for the money, and they won't eat their own beef, but want 'English prime' and a pudding on the table every day of the week—which is absurd."

"Which is absurd!" echoed Nell.

"Well then, my dear, it comes to this—are you sure that window is shut? in a fortnight our present boarders will have left us; there is no season to speak of in the winter; my lease expires almost immediately: I shall give up the whole concern, and we will go and live comfortably somewhere else."

"Then we are to separate?" asked Nell.

"Good gracious, no, dear! Who said anything about separating? You know quite well that I can't get on without you; and think how much we shall save by living together! We will go—you and I and my brother, and live where we please—somewhere near your sculptor's studio, for my work can be done anywhere, and Joseph will live wherever it suits us. The slide-painting has

improved; *you* will soon be earning money of your own, and we shall get on famously!"

"It sounds very nice," said Nell.

"And it will be better than it sounds. Now put the pills where I can reach them, and say good-night; we will talk more about it to-morrow."

At the foot of the stairs, Nell encountered Joe. His face was ablaze with delight.

"Whisper!" he said. "Do you know what is going to happen? Do you know what Teresa, that heroic woman, has settled on? She has given the order to march, to move on, to clear out, to evacuate; we are going out of the desert into the promised land, you and she and I! Look here, we are going to do this;" and Joe lifted his sound leg and kicked at the air till he was out of breath; by which expressive pantomime he signified the violent overthrowing of the Anglo-American Boarding-house. "When I think," continued Joe, growing calmer, and speaking impressively; "when I think that in a month from this time I shall never have to tell another lie to account for the mutton running short, or the eggs being boiled like bricks, or the stew done to rags, or the toast to cinders; that I shall never have to shiver in my shoes when all the boarders set down their tea-cups and 'think they won't take any tea to-night,' because the cook forgot to put anything but hot water in the pot; that I shall never more have to squeeze out the crocodile tear of merriment over jokes about Washington and Webster and Horace Greeley, which every boarder has told every summer since we went into business; that I shall never again have to threaten the cook with the policeman if she drinks a drop of beer till dinner is over; when I think of these things, Miss Haffenden, I feel that if I lived two centuries more I could never do enough to—to—well, well, Teresa's a noble woman. I shouldn't wonder if she were doing it all on my account; she's always thinking of me."

"Well," said Nell, who had her own notions on the subject of Miss Gripp's generosity; "my opinion is that you have quite earned your release."

"No," insisted Joe; "no, I won't hear of that. I get a great deal more consideration than I deserve. Why," he exclaimed as the matter dawned upon him in a new light,

"I shan't have to get up by candlelight any more, and clean sixteen pairs of boots before seven-thirty." And glowing with satisfaction at the thought of this crowning consequence of Teresa's resolution, Joe turned about and limped downstairs to the lower regions, chuckling solemnly at every step.

The prospect of change was in no way disagreeable to Nell. She welcomed it for the promise it gave of an almost complete freedom from duties which had never been specially congenial, and which her student's life had rendered more than ever tasteless and irksome. The boarding-house had served its purpose. It had given her a home free of expense; the position of responsibility which she held in it had called out and strengthened faculties that she had scarcely known herself to possess; and in the society of her fellow-boarders her social as well as her intellectual nature had expanded and quickened, while, better than all, she had received full sympathy and encouragement in her work; for they were all workers together. Nevertheless, coming at this particular time, she felt that the change would be opportune, and a gain rather than a loss.

The days slipped away, and the time of departure was close at hand. The boarders had gone as far as was possible toward achieving the quite impossible feat of exhausting London—its history, its sights, and its people. Miss Anderson informed the company at dinner one day that she was "about plum full of the old thing," meaning by the "old thing" the British Metropolis; and indeed, the boarders, one and all, had pretty nearly converted themselves into walking dictionaries of the capital city.

"I should expect, ma'am," said Miss M'Gee to Nell, "that it's the ugliest and most interestin' place in creation. As for your folks, I think they're comin' on. Your ladies begin to go on the stump, which is promisin'. But they don't sass the young men enough, they don't lace their figgers tight enough, and they use their pocket-handkerchiefs in company. Your nice young men beat ours into blue fits in points of style and po—liteness. They don't dress themselves worth anything, and they can't talk; but they can hand a lady about, and they don't stare her out of face or crowd her in public places. Your lords, looked at on

the outside, are puffectly byutiful, but I'm told that quite a number of them never read Shakespeare. Take you all round, ma'am, you get the bulge on us in style, but we beat you in eddication; but you're comin' on, and I think you'll do."

The person most visibly affected, as the time drew near for the break-up of the establishment in Keppel Street, was Mr. Victor J. Claypole. A curious change was noticeable in his manners and movements. His very gait was altered; he went about delicately, as one that was lost in pleasant dreamy thoughts, or troubled with corns. He spoke more softly and slowly than ever; a gentle pensiveness encompassed him. Miss Anderson said he looked like one who was "preparin' for his end." Miss M'Gee had known men conduct themselves thus when they were "gettin' ready for a spell of toothache." But, being wholly uncommunicative, Mr. Claypole remained wrapped about in mystery.

On a certain evening, two days before he was to sail for America, he suddenly brightened. He flitted about the drawing-room after dinner, unable to settle anywhere or do anything; he broke again into poetry; he hummed a melody, the burden of which was tender.

In due time the rest of the boarders withdrew, but Mr. Claypole remained sitting on the ottoman still humming his melody. Nell found him there when she went her last rounds to fasten the windows and put out the lights.

"I would like, ma'am," said Mr. Claypole, in a subdued and tentative manner, "I would like to speak a little piece with you."

Nell seated herself in the professor's chair, and looked inquiringly at him.

"My home," began Mr. Claypole, addressing himself not so much to Nell as to the gilt clock over her head; "my home is in the flowery West."

As Nell could not possibly simulate surprise, hardly even interest, in a statement which she had heard a hundred times already, she merely replied:

"Yes, Mr. Claypole?"

"I thank you, ma'am; yes, that is just about where it is."

"You will be very glad, I am sure, Mr. Claypole, to return to your home," said Nell.

"I shall return to my home, ma'am, the happiest or the onhappiest man alive."

"I have no right, Mr. Claypole," said Nell, not quite certain whether she were amused or bored, "to ask the circumstances on which your happiness depends."

"Ma'am," replied the young man fervently, "you are the one almighty Circum*stance*."

"I, Mr. Claypole? I? I do not understand you."

With a sudden fear that he was precipitating matters Mr. Claypole calmed himself, and fell back upon antiquity.

"The ancients, ma'am," said he, "presumed that love was the oldest of the Gods."

"I think I understand you now, Mr. Claypole," answered Nell, rising from her seat; "and, understanding you, I cannot hear you any more."

"But, Miss Haffenden, ma'am, you have heard nothing yet. I have the most onparalleled feelings for you."

"I am the more sorry for that," she replied, "as my feelings for you, Mr. Claypole, are only those of friendship and esteem."

"Ma'am," said Mr. Claypole feebly, "I am ready for the grave."

"Oh, no, Mr. Claypole, not at all. You will return to your home in the flowery West and write your book, and present it to Queen Victoria, and grow to great fame. You have a magnificent future!"

"P'raps, ma'am," said Mr. Claypole, ignoring this bright prospect, "p'raps I let it out too smart. You didn't give me time. If you'd sat around and fingered somethin', I could have put it figgerative. I could have spoke some potry. I could have talked about leadin' you to the—the—I could have said that we'd assoom the chains of—I could have quoted Scriptur—why, Miss Haffenden, ma'am, I could have said that we'd best get married!"

"But you have said it already by implication, Mr. Claypole, and, though conscious of the honour you have done me, I have replied that I cannot hear your proposal."

"I didn't greatly reckon you would, ma'am," answered Mr. Claypole resignedly, in final token of defeat, and gathering himself together he went to bed, and Nell put out the lights.

In less than a week the hall was blocked with the enor-

mous trunks of the whole party; Miss Gripp, from her bedroom, piped shrill injunctions to everybody to be careful of the wall-paper and the balusters; and the professor, in settling his account with Joe, took advantage of the general hurry and confusion to protest that he had no small change, and that the shillings and pence must consequently be remitted. He and his party were bound for Paris, Miss Meadows and Miss M'Gee were to accompany them, and Mr. Claypole's face was set for the flowery West.

In the midst of the bustle the last-named gentleman approached Nell, and taking a package from his pocket, said wistfully:

"Will you be so kind, ma'am, as accept of my features?" He tendered a photograph as he spoke, which represented him with a flower in his button-hole, and a desperately woe begone expression.

"I shall treasure it as a keepsake," said Nell warmly, "and if you will wait a moment I will give you mine."

The young American looked at the fair face on the photograph, and something like a tear shone in his eye. "It's too good to be buried in this," he said, as he put it in the pocket of his note-book. "I b'lieve I'll get it—reprodooced, and make it the frontispiece of my book."

"Oh, no, Mr. Claypole; the Queen must be the frontispiece, if you are going to dedicate it to Her Majesty."

"Is that so, ma'am? Then I'll fix you in the middle. Miss Haffenden, I wish you good-bye and prosperity. When you've soared, remember that V. J. C. was a prophet, and remember, also, that he will never cease to wish you well."

The professor said "all aboard" for the last time; Miss M'Gee renewed her commission to Nell to execute her portrait in marble in the year that she was President; Joe stood in the background and smacked his lips sympathetically as Nell and the girls exchanged salutes; and the next moment the hall was cleared, and the boarding-house had ceased to exist.

CHAPTER XXI.

SOMEBODY "SEEMS TO REMEMBER" THE NAME OF HAFFENDEN.

MARTIN CLYMO's frame of mind, for several days after his last meeting with Nell, was a distinctly uncomfortable one. He thought over his conduct with as near an approach to reason as was just then possible to him, and perceived that he had been an egregious fool. The harder he thought about it, the clearer grew the light in which his folly showed itself. He saw, moreover, and with unpleasant distinctness, that he had not only been a fool, but a bully and a brute besides.

It provokes some disquiet in the bosom of the least sophisticated individual when he has to put upon himself three such discourteous epithets as these, and Martin's susceptibilities, which were not always of the finest, sustained a rather disagreeable shock.

He fell to abusing himself with gusto, with so much gusto, in fact, that he a little overdid it at length; and, smarting under the sting of his own tongue, began to make his peace with himself, and to cast about for something that might excuse him. He found, or thought that he found, a plea in Nell herself. It was a stale one, to be sure.

This had always been his resort when he wanted to explain away some bad bit of behaviour toward Nell. It was she who had changed. "She hadn't treated him as she used to."

But truth crept in upon him, and said that this time at any rate that shift wouldn't serve. She had given him smiles and warmth and kindness; he had met her first

sullenly, then coarsely, and lastly, with a coward's unmeaning threat.

Clearly the case grew worse and worse. He had cornered himself, and couldn't get out.

Martin was one of those people who will not accept the logic of facts. Nell had shown him plainly enough that there could be nothing but friendship between them in the future, but this did not suffice. He still loved her hotly, after his own fashion, but his love had almost lost such pure and honest qualities as it might once have held, and there was mixed up with it now the grosser desire of possession for possession's sake. The real sting lay in his forced recognition that the distance between them had increased immeasurably within the past few months, that the gulf had become impassable, that she was now in every respect his infinite superior. She had found her place in a world in which there was no possible footing for one who had always despised with boorish frankness the qualities that had put her there. He was jealous of her new-made friends, who certainly would not be likely to recognise an equal in him; he was jealous of her work, which he could not appreciate, because he did not understand it.

Let it be allowed that his plight was an unhappy one. He had turned his back on his own proper life; he had deliberately elected to go out of that small bucolic world which was his own, to which he belonged by natural right, solely that he might win back to it, by one course or another, the woman who was the centre of his existence. But he had come only to find that the nearer he approached to her the further was she carried from him, and here at the very outset he had done his best to cut the ground from under his own feet by showing her, almost within the hour of their meeting, how wisely she had done in declining him six months ago.

He had lost ground even before the race began; he would have to make that good before he could hope to advance a step.

There was a great deal of stubbornness in Clymo. It was one thing for him to perceive his fault; it was another to acknowledge and endeavour to atone it. Nevertheless, if he were not to confess himself hopelessly

worsted on the threshold, he must mend the matter somehow and begin anew.

Then a struggle commenced between his better and his worse nature, which lasted the greater part of a week. At the end of that time he found himself in a fairly penitent mood, and resolved to make another effort to set himself straight with Nell. His loneliness was beginning to tell upon him. He had no friends, and hardly an acquaintance in town; his business occupied not more than half his day, so that he lived the greater part of the time drearily enough in a couple of dingy rooms near the Charterhouse.

How should he make his peace with Nell? He would open up with a present of flowers. "She'd pull flowers about by the hour, any time," mused Martin; and puzzle as he might, he could think of no better peace-offering than "one o' those Covent Garden nosegays." In search of a Covent Garden nosegay, therefore, he went one afternoon.

"A good big one," said Martin to the flower-merchant, who requested him to pick for himself. He turned over one gaudy bouquet after another, but was not satisfied.

The florist coughed a modest and a deprecatory cough, and took up a huge one—a mass of primary colours.

"The *danseuses*," he said, "are extremely partial to this style of thing."

"The who?" asked Martin.

The shopman by way of reply, lifted his apron delicately by the corners, and executed a brief *pas seul* behind his counter.

"I don't know what the devil you mean," said Martin.

"The ladies of the ballet—I beg pardon, sir—gentleman from the country, I fancy—thought you might want it for presentation behind the scenes—this is the kind of thing they like."

Martin burst into a laugh. The shopman's error in taking him for a greenroom gallant tickled him hugely.

"You're wrong there," said he. "That's not my sort. I must have something quieter than this;" and with the aid of the lively florist he chose a pretty simple bouquet, and paid about a hundred times its value.

"Warmish work this," thought Martin, but for the credit of the character which the gallant florist had created for him he did not grumble aloud.

"Can I get a man to carry this for me?" he said. "It's no great way; about a mile from here."

The florist ruminated, with his finger to his nose.

"A delicate errand—bouquet to a lady—wants a nice fine man—none of your low porters. Ah! the very person —he's within earshot of us. One moment, sir." And stepping out from his shop, he called across the market: "Mr. Garrick, Mr. Garrick, sir; a word with you."

Under the arches on the other side of the way a small man was pacing up and down, with one hand in the bosom of his coat, and the other behind his back. He was a smooth-faced, slender little man, with gray hair straggling beneath his hat; very clean and very shabby. He looked up when the florist called, and walked briskly across the market.

"This is the man, sir—quite a lady's man, as you observe—a theatrical artist, sir; but one who has, unhappily, never taken the rank to which his merits entitle him. His name is Garrick—a great name, sir, in the history of our stage—and he will figure in the next Covent Garden pantomime as the hind legs of an elephant."

The florist explained the business, and bowing profoundly to Martin, retired to his shop, and fell to contemplation of the bouquets which were favoured by the ladies of the ballet.

The theatrical artist eyed the bouquet in Martin's hand with a grave, dubious air. He was a cheery-looking little fellow, with a bright brown eye and a healthy colour.

"I shall do it in this style," said he. And drawing himself up to his full inches he bowed, not without grace, and made a sweeping motion with his arm: "He whom you know, madame, has sent you these poor blossoms."

"They cost a guinea, you know," said Martin.

"Tut! Leave the price aside. 'Tis dross! 'Twould mar the scene."

"Well, anyhow, I don't think you'll see the lady herself."

"I have another style for maids. As thus: 'This to your mistress.'"

"But you don't know yet where you're going to."

"You will give me the address, written in a bold and careless hand. If you disguise it, so much the better; there is romance in it."

"I don't know but I might write a note with it," said Martin.

"You shall; follow me." And turning about, the old man walked straight to the "Britannia" tavern at the corner of James Street, and into the private bar.

Martin seated himself, and tearing a leaf from his pocket-book, began to write. The composition of a letter of penitence cost him some labour, and an occasional groan. The theatrical artist eyed him with a paternal air, and when he groaned for the third time said, half aloud and half to himself: "Unrest, unrest; a weight upon my mind. Mary," to the barmaid, "you have known me from a child, Mary—I mean I have known you from a child; what am I used to do when care sits heavy on my mind?"

"Three of rum warm, Mr. Garrick," replied the young lady promptly. The old man turned to Martin, who looked up and laughed, and ordered two rums warm.

"Thank you, sir; yes, I believe I will, for I am heavy myself to-day. I am very heavy to-day. Oh, Lord! the hind legs!"

"Bah! I can't write," said Martin impatiently, crumpling the paper in his hand. "I've nothing to say, and don't know how to say it. See, I'll give you the address, and you can take the flowers alone."

He wrote Nell's name, and the address of the house in Keppel Street, and gave it to the super.

"H-a-f, Haf; f-e-n, fen; d-e-n, den; Haffenden. That's a proper name. I can carry flowers to Miss Haffenden. Not a common name at all."

"No," said Martin, "I know but one of the name; and I never heard it before."

"Stay, though; I think *I* have," said Garrick. "Let me see; it takes me back many years; but I have heard that name, and known it too. Haffenden, Haf—yes, I seem to remember it."

"Well, come, then; set to work and think again. I'd like to know who your Haffenden was," said Martin.

"There's a cloud about my brain. Mary, when there's a cloud about my——"

"Two of gin neat, Mr. Garrick," called Mary from the other end of the bar.

"A truthful child, sir," said the old man. "I've been almost a father to her. H-a-f——"

"Well, I don't mind going two of gin, if it'll clear your brain," answered Martin. "There; are you any nearer to it now?"

"A mystery, a mystery! There's mystery mixed up with it; what was the mystery? And what was her other name?"

"It was a woman then, was it?" asked Martin, who began to be interested.

"It was a woman, sir; and her name—her name," said the old man slowly, "was Sarah."

"Sarah Haffenden! what mystery was there about her?" asked Martin quickly, and in no small astonishment.

"Did you know Sarah Haffenden, sir?"

"I did know one of that name," answered Martin. "And, as you say, it's not a common name. But what about the mystery?"

"Eighteen—twenty—twenty-two; it's a matter of two or three-and-twenty years ago. You don't get that far back in a minute. But there was a mystery; ay, and a trouble too. I call that to mind clear enough."

"Look here," said Martin, with more eagerness than he cared to show, "I'd like to go a bit further into this. It might turn out that your Sarah and mine were the same. Come up to-morrow night to my lodgings, and we'll go into it together. There's the address. I want to get at that mystery and that trouble."

"To-morrow night, sir, I am yours. And now I go to bear these flowers to your lady. She's a Haffenden, too; but what does she know of mysteries or troubles? She? Tut! She's a rose, a gilly-flower, a silver dewdrop i' the morning sun—but *I*? Oh, damnation!"

CHAPTER XXII.

FRANCIS LYNE.

FRANCIS LYNE was of good birth, and had been brought up in abundant luxury. His mother, from whom he received his own high and faithful nature, had died while he was a child. His father, who had held the rank of colonel in a cavalry regiment, had been a somewhat dissolute gallant; and father and son had had few feelings in common. Retiring from the army in middle age, the colonel spent most of his time abroad, and divided the chief part of the year between Chantilly and Monaco. Francis went to school and college; and leaving Cambridge, travelled for a year in France and Italy. On his way home he went to Nice to see his father.

He arrived there on the morning after the colonel had lost four-fifths of his remaining fortune at a private gaming-table. There had been a suspicion of foul play, and the colonel had quarrelled with and challenged his adversary.

As Francis was entering his father's lodgings, he met the colonel coming out, who said airily that he had an engagement with a friend; and sent him upstairs, promising to return in half an hour. In less than that time he was carried in mortally wounded, and died in a few minutes in the arms of his son. The event moved Francis profoundly, and he was long in recovering a healthy tone of mind.

The settlement of his father's debts, and an equal division of the remaining property between his two sisters and himself, left Francis without enough to live upon. He was four-and-twenty, and had no profession.

During his last year at Cambridge his thoughts had inclined to the Church, and he had never quite abandoned

the desire he then formed of taking holy orders. The thought returned to him after his father's death, and at the end of another year he entered the ministry, and began work in the East End. He was now nine-and-twenty, and had lately accepted an inconsiderable living in one of the worst parishes in London.

He had two sisters, distinguished beauties in that world from which he was a voluntary exile, who had very small sympathy with his work.

There was something odd, almost anomalous, in the friendship of Lyne and Horace. They had no more likeness to each other than water has to wine. Their very differences had drawn them together at the first. They met at Florence, shortly after the death of Lyne's father, when Horace was just completing his student's course under Brucciani. Frank, in his desolate and lonely state, had been attracted by the lightsome sculptor, who beneath his boasted idleness and love of ease nourished an ardent, affectionate nature. They saw a great deal of each other in those days; and it was Horace who, when he knew the bent of his friend's desires, encouraged and strengthened him in his purpose, and in this way did a good deal toward launching him on his clerical career.

Since they had both established themselves in London they had met only now and again, and at long intervals; but their friendship had grown into the state which infrequency of meeting has no power of modifying.

Now that Lyne had got back to work, Horace was rather at a standstill with the bust; but he was indulged in an occasional sitting. It was Monday, rather a leisure day with the Vicar, and they were together in Horace's studio.

"Keep your head still, dear boy," said Horace. "You're the most incorrigible sort of model I ever had. You had the most beautiful pious expression imaginable just now—if your hair were six inches longer I might have made a John the Baptist of you. What have you done with it?"

"With my hair?"

"No, with your expression."

"Oh, I'm not going to look saintly to please you, Horace; and if you put any sanctimonious nonsense into this thing I shall disown it."

"I'll make an Objibbewa of you if you don't sit still, Frank. I'll give you such a look that the bishop will unfrock you the day after he visits the Academy. Ah! I thought that would fetch you; now sit like that for ten minutes, and I'll let you go. Well, Frank, does the revolution ripen?"

"What revolution?"

"Why, yours in the East End."

"Don't be a fool, Racy. I'm no revolutionary."

"Well, your friends down there are going ahead, anyway. They said at a meeting of the League the other night——"

"Oh, bother the League, Racy!"

"This, Frank," said Horace gravely, "is rank treason. I shall denounce you to the executive committee."

"My dear fellow, you know very well why I joined the League, and how far I go with it. If I could get my ends by standing up in the pulpit and saying that such and such things ought to be done, it is quite possible that the League would never have had my shilling."

"To think," said Horace, "that for the payment of one shilling (you can hardly get a good cigar for less) one may acquire the rights of a full-blown advocate of sedition! It's too cheap, Frank."

"For the matter of that, you may acquire them without the shilling," said Lyne. "But get on with the bust; I want to be off. You've done more than enough at it now."

"No, I haven't; sit still. It won't do you any harm to be idle here for another quarter of an hour; you're not strong enough to work full time yet. Frank, my excellent friend, my reverend pastor, I have been thinking about you very seriously of late, and I have arrived at the conclusion that you ought to change your state."

"My position, you mean," said Lyne. "I've got a cramp in my neck already."

"I will have no flippant churchmen in my studio. You're not in the pulpit now, you know," replied Horace. "No, Frank, I mean what I say. You live too much alone. It is not good, says the Scripture——"

"Since when have you begun match-making, young carver?" interrupted Lyne, with a laugh. "Too much alone! I! Why, I haven't a sixth part of the day to myself. I live in a perpetual crowd."

"A man may do all that, and be a solitary," answered Horace.

"Yes, if the crowd be nothing to him; but that's not my case, you see; I'm a part of it."

"Why don't you marry, Frank?" said Horace abruptly.

"I am going," rejoined Lyne, with equal abruptness, rising and stretching himself.

"To get married?"

"Get married! What has come to the boy? He can't talk rationally for ten minutes together."

"Oh, yes, he can. Sit down; I haven't done with you yet. You've not answered my question."

Lyne laughed, and began to pace the end of the studio where Horace was working.

"You remember what Bacon has to say on this matter?" said he.

"Oh, yes; I know all about Bacon. 'Whoso takes a wife, has given hostages to fortune.' That's it, isn't it? But that shan't serve you; it's too late."

"It's a sound answer," replied Lyne.

"It's a weak one," said Horace.

"Think of my life, Racy," continued Lyne, speaking more seriously. "Is it one to share with a woman? What woman could I ask to go down into the east and live with me there? No; I am best alone."

"Very well; let us change the subject," said Horace. "How do you like my new comrade?"

"What comrade, Racy?"

"You know her; Miss Haffenden."

"Is she your comrade?"

"Oh, yes; we are chums."

"Fortunate for you, Racy," said Lyne quietly. "But come," he added, getting up again, "you've kept me too long. I have to preach in the open this afternoon. Good-bye; you shall see me again on my first lazy day."

Horace had unwittingly touched a tender spot in his friend's nature. In all the years that Lyne had been working in the east the work itself had been sufficient for him. He loved it; he was never weary at it; day by day its charm was renewed; it was health and strength and pleasure to him. He had vigour and to spare; he would

keep no curate; and at this time he was more than ever disposed to do without one; to be his own lieutenant as well as his own general. But he had lately been conscious of a feeling that was quite new to him.

It was very vague; it had a definite but scarcely a definable existence; it took no outward or visible expression. It was a feeling that visited him at odd times, and chiefly in his vacant moments, though never wholly absent.

So far from interfering with him in his work it added a fresh zest to it; it brightened his horizon; it made the task of building that new Jerusalem in the East seem almost a feasible one.

It was this feeling which had been provoked afresh by Horace's words about Nell. By some unconscious mental process he had come to connect that feeling with her and with her name; but it was a connection which he was hardly willing to acknowledge, and that for two chief reasons.

He had a fine sense of honour, and where women were concerned a great deal of chivalry. So that when this new feeling arose in his mind, and called up there the name and image of Nell Haffenden, his sense of chivalry toward her, and of honour toward his friend, urged him to repress, if not the feeling—which was a wholesome and stimulating one—the dim involuntary consciousness that she was the source and strength of it.

For it seemed to Lyne the most natural thing in the world that, whether or no Nell were in love with Horace, Horace should be in love with Nell; which was reason enough for him why he should stand well clear of their path.

Nevertheless he made no effort to hide from himself his satisfaction that he had found a sympathiser in one who already went far to realise his ideal of womanly helpfulness.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CHANGE OF QUARTERS—NELL SEES THAT IT IS A HIGH HILL TO FAME.

MISS GRIPP'S lease of the house in Keppel Street having run out in the nick of time, she and her brother and Nell were free to choose a new dwelling-place in whatever part of the town it pleased them. Several circumstances combined to counsel a move westward. Miss Gripp's chief patron in the matter of the medical slides—which henceforth were to be one of the main props of that lady's fragile existence—was a physician on the staff of St. Thomas's Hospital. Nell's work was in Kensington; and she was anxious to save the long journey twice a day between Keppel Street and the Abbey. Joe's opinion was, that whatever locality the ladies selected would be eminently the best for him; so, after a great many of those parlour councils, without which Teresa (though she generally reserved to herself the final and casting vote) never took any new step of importance, and after many calculations as to the comparative cost of housekeeping in different West End neighbourhoods, they fixed on a small house in a sheltered nook of Brompton.

It was just big enough for the three of them. Joe naturally gravitated to the basement; the front drawing-room was transformed into a bedroom for Miss Gripp, and Nell rose two degrees in her own estimation when she found herself the possessor of a diminutive sitting-room on the top floor. The Keppel Street furniture, which had never quite filled the boarding-house, stocked the new abode plentifully. Miss Gripp's grandpapa underwent a

liberal dusting, and was hung on the wall of the dining-room, where he settled himself comfortably, and distilled a fresh supply of benevolence on the household.

Joe, released from all his ancient cares, put some two-score years off his shoulders, and became a gay and careless youth of twenty. Representing to his tailor that he was about to begin life afresh under the most promising auspices, he got his second-best coat turned for a merely nominal sum, had a new band to his wide-awake, and invested a trifle in wax, with a view to renovating his moustache.

On fine mornings he sunned himself on the pavement in an old pair of patent leather boots which creaked prodigiously; and altogether Joe took on such an easy and opulent air, that the maiden lady over the way imagined him to be a retired Indian officer, and commenced without hesitation or delay to lay siege to his happiness.

Teresa, too, freed from culinary and other nightmares respecting the boarding-house, and no longer dreading the advent either of quarter-day or the dinner-hour, expanded to her utmost limits of geniality; and there was, in fine, a mellow and a kindly atmosphere pervading the little establishment, which Joe said reminded him of nothing so much as of the middle period of a supper-party.

They had to be very economical, of course; but that mattered little, for economy had long since become a second nature to Teresa and Joe; and as for Nell, she had practised it of necessity all her life.

Nell, however, at this time seemed to herself to be growing into unbounded riches. Her little store had reached a very low ebb, and she was just beginning to experience what a modern romancist has called "that ignoble melancholy which springs from pecuniary embarrassment," when her good friend and patron of the Abbey informed her one morning that her services as his "assistant" had become of sufficient value to entitle her to a weekly salary.

Nell demurred, but the Chief insisted; and in the end, supported by Mrs. Harte, he had his way, and Nell found herself in the receipt of no less a sum than two pounds sterling per week.

Her old lover was now her only trouble. She had had Martin's flowers, but hardly knew in what spirit to receive that peace-offering. She felt that he had set a breach

between them which a bare handful of flowers, sent with no other token of apology or regret, could by no means fill up. He had deeply wounded and offended her; and she was very sore in spirit.

When Martin went away from her at the boarding-house that evening, she had felt a deeper contempt for him than she could have supposed it possible to feel for any man. She had wished never to see him again; she had tried to forget him and everything that had ever been between them.

What was he, that he should thrust himself so roughly upon her, when she had given him his answer long ago? What right was his to try and force himself between her friends and her; to say whom she should and whom she should not know; to assert a claim upon her; to meet her with a coarse threat, when she had but repeated her refusal of six months ago?

She had almost hated Martin for the unmanly violence of his words; while in her anger she felt a hearty pleasure at the thought that he had broken the last link of the chain that held them together; and though she had relented a little since then, her sense of wrong was yet too poignant to let her heart be warmed toward him.

So, since she did not feel that he had made a far enough advance by a mere present of flowers (which had not even come from his own hand), and since she knew his nature well enough to be sure that his sending them without a word betokened that his penitence was not complete, she had made no acknowledgment of his gift beyond a verbal message through the bringer; nor had taken any further step toward reconciliation. Martin had been so fully in the wrong this time, that the burden of his atoning must not be lightened by her.

This was the one cloud in her sky. Her nature sorted with her artist's work, and her life in the studio was completely happy. She was pressing on, bravely and with reasonable speed, over the rough path of the beginner; but she had already made a discovery. It was, that the goal of her ambition was a very long way off; such a long way that the beacon-light showed only like a little star, and the intervening ground was steep and stony.

At first she was impatient; she wanted to fly before she

had found her wings. She was full of imaginative energy; she had ideas; she could conceive and think out a subject; could put upon paper the rough sketch of an original work; but she lacked as yet the technical knowledge and the manual dexterity which the artist must have before he can pass from the plane of invention to the (at first) far more difficult one of execution.

It was Harte who curbed her impatience, and made her know the limits, both mental and physical, which are set about the path of the beginner, and may not easily be put aside.

He used to rally her in his gentle way.

"Don't be in a hurry, take your time; no one is very anxious to buy our work when we have done it. There is only one duke in England who buys sculpture; the others get it by inheritance, and sell it by auction."

Then Nell began to think of the future in a more moderate and less romantic spirit, and to keep her hopes in check; and before long she realised to the full that whatever success the days to come might hold for her, it could not be won at an easy rate.

CHAPTER XXIV

HORACE WARMS HIS STUDIO.

"NELL," said Horace, one day toward the middle of October when she had run in to bid him good morning, on her way to the Abbey, "we must warm the studio."

"I think it has a very nice temperature now, but you could have the grate enlarged without much expense," she answered.

"I do not speak of the warmth that is generated in grates, most prudent housewife. I mean that my friends must be invited here to felicitate me on my start in life. They must come, as Frank's demagogues say when they are rallying the people, 'in their thousands.' They must sing the praises of my 'Nymph,' and be introduced to you, and drink a little wine and coffee, and go away, and tell the critics that I am the most promising sculptor of the day."

"That will be delightful, Horace; you shall give an 'at home.'"

"Yes, and you shall do the honours; of course under the wing of Mrs. Harte, who is the most delightful chaperone in the world."

"Oh, Horace! it will be 'puffectly delightful,' as Miss M'Gee used to say. How many people can you ask?"

"I'll ask every one I know; the whole Court Directory. They won't all come, and if they do, Tigg will lend his studio for an overflow meeting."

In the course of a day or two Horace had drawn up a portentous list of persons to be invited, and Nell had given what was for her a very unusual amount of study to the subject of a costume.

"As this is to be in the nature of a first appearance,

Nell—a sort of lead-off, you know—it must be done regardless of expense. What can you suggest in the matter of wines?" said Horace.

"Mr. Gripp knows all about wines," replied Nell.

"Does he? Then we'll ask him to be kind enough to undertake that department."

"If you will let him choose the wines himself, and carry them with his own hand—for he says wines should be carried warily—and draw all the corks, I am sure he would be delighted."

"If he does all that he will be a prince," said Horace. "Win him over this evening, Nell; and give him *carte blanche* to roam the whole wine-market in search of prime brands."

"Have you quite finished your list, Horace?"

"Y—yes; there's—there's one name—I don't know whether we might add it, Nell. Do you think you could manage to bring your friend? If she would but sing for us, the success of the thing would be assured; and we want it to be a success, don't we, Nell?"

"You mean Mabel? She would like to come, I think; but she hardly ever goes anywhere. I'll try, though. Yes, if she would sing, that would be grand."

"That finishes the list, Nell. And now, for the day. You wouldn't like it on a Sunday, would you? That's quite a correct day for this sort of thing, you know."

"No; I won't have it on a Sunday. I don't pose as a Sabbatarian; but these people can come quite as well on a week-day; and besides, Horace, you—you've invited Mr. Lyne, and *he* couldn't come on Sunday."

"To be sure. I should have thought of Frank. Then we'll make it Saturday."

As the autumn season was well advanced, most of the town-birds had flown home again; so that Horace's first "at home" bade fair to be numerously attended. He had a host of friends, and any number of acquaintances; and as this was the earliest artistic gathering of the "middle" season, it had the special interest of novelty.

So many people came, in fact, that Tigg's offer of his studio, for what Horace called the overflow meeting, was readily accepted

The scene was quite new to Nell; it was the first approach to a gathering of fashion she had ever witnessed. The room was so crowded that no one had a chance of studying the objects of art; but as no one had come for that purpose it did not greatly matter.

Mr. Slingfield was there, with his hair curled, and a violet velvet coat, attended by a tail of worshipping young ladies. He led them to Horace's "Nymph," the defects of which he proceeded to point out, in a commendably honest spirit, and an undertone.

Nell had had some difficulty in persuading Mabel to come, for she was quiet and shy, and seldom went but where her musical studies called her. She looked very pretty that afternoon, in a dark, close-fitting dress, which heightened her pale complexion. Nell did not overshadow her in the least, though her presence was more striking, and her beauty richer. They looked very well together, and many glances were directed toward where they sat.

But Nell was not much given to sitting still; and the movement of the crowd made her restless. "Let us get up and walk about," she said to Mabel; but Mabel preferred the part of onlooker, and could not be drawn from her corner. So Nell got up and began to make her way alone amongst the groups that thronged the studio.

She had not got far before she was aware that a man was following her. She turned half about, and the man stopped and fixed his gaze on a medallion upon the wall. Nell went on, and the man again followed her. At the end of the studio she stopped, and turned about, and the man faced her.

He was a jaunty, shabby little man, with keen eyes and a reddish stubble covering his lip and chin.

Nell, who was at least a couple of inches his superior in height, looked down upon him, and felt half disposed to say, "What can I do for you, my little man?"

He made an effort to bow, which the pressure of the crowd rendered rather a difficult piece of courtesy, and said, in a shrill whisper, "I think I have the honour of speaking to Miss Haffenden?"

"Yes; that is my name," replied Nell.

"A pupil of Mr. Harte, I think—Julian Harte, you know?"

"Yes, I am his pupil."

"You won't mind my saying that I am the representative of the *Pen and Palette*, will you?" went on the little man.

"Not in the least, if you won't mind saying what the representative of the *Pen and Palette* can want with me."

"Oh! it's no secret, I assure you. Harte doesn't take a pupil every day, you know; and when he does, we look for something first-rate. It has been talked of in art circles, upon my word."

"But," said Nell, "I don't at all see what interest the art circles can have in a mere pupil."

"Oh! the keenest interest, really. People want to know what you are doing, you see. Will you tell me what you propose to send to the Academy?"

"I don't think I shall send anything there," replied Nell.

"Ah! you will make your *début* at the Grosvenor?"

"No, I don't think the Grosvenor will see anything of mine, either."

"H'm," said the little man, a trifle disappointed. "You think it best to begin with the provincial exhibitions?"

"I think it very improbable," said Nell, "that I shall be represented at any exhibition. You see, sir, I am the merest beginner; I have hardly yet learned the A B C of my art."

"I don't quite understand it," said the little man, rather peevishly. "You must have done something, or be about to do something, you know; or Harte would never have taken you."

"I think he must have taken me out of charity," said Nell.

"Eh? But that wouldn't look at all well in print," observed the representative of the *Pen and Palette*, tickling his nose with a stump of pencil. "No; I know what it is," he went on, brightening. "You have shown promise—you have shown tremendous promise. That is what took Harte's fancy, depend upon it. You really must allow me to say so;" and pulling down a dirty shirt-cuff, he made a note on it in shorthand.

"A little bit of personal description goes a long way in these matters," he said, looking up again. "You've no

idea how it stimulates the interest of the reader; and it's rather a strong point with me. Would you mind telling me your height?"

"Really, I don't know how tall I am," laughed Nell. "Suppose you put it down 'heroic'—that is something above the natural and below the colossal. Don't you think that would sound well?"

"I think it would," said the reporter, and made another note on his shirt-cuff: "Her stature may best be described as heroic."

While Nell was undergoing her first experience of the interviewer, her eyes had wandered once or twice, with an amused interest, to the far end of the room, where Horace was flitting restlessly about, with an evident desire to approach Mabel. By-and-by the opportunity that he was seeking came. He went up to her and said, "I want you to grant me a favour. Will you sing for me?"

"If you would like it," she answered.

"I should like it above everything," said Horace. "I have never forgotten how you sang to the ragged fellows on that Sunday in September."

A momentary flush of pleasure showed in her soft cheeks, and mounted to her forehead. She rose, and he led her to the centre of the room, where the piano was placed. She ran through some music which the accompanist had brought, and lighted on a song of Schubert's. The effect of her singing in the studio was not unlike that which she had produced on the occasion where we first heard her; there was a sudden stillness, followed by a close and eager listening; and when she had finished there was a pause before any one found words to praise her. Horace was delighted. He went and sat down beside her; and his manner became quite earnest as he gave her his thanks.

"I think the echoes of your voice will never leave my studio," he said; "and one day it will have a fame of its own, as the place where you made one of your first triumphs."

"I hope that one day it will have a fame of a very different kind," she answered.

Toward the middle of the afternoon, a burly middle-aged man, with a round back, a rough head of hair, and an extravagant beard, shouldered his way into the room, and

inquired in a loud voice for the tea-table. He came in frowning; and, like Mr. Slingfield, he had a numerous following of ladies. An amused whisper went round—"Mr. Bledsoe, the critic!"

Failing to come within reach of the tea-table, for the studio was now densely crowded, he appropriated to himself the stool of the pianist, and dusted his head with a silk pocket-handkerchief. His satellites made a circle about him, and looked on him admiringly.

"He will speak presently," whispered one lady to her companion. "I wish he had a more comfortable seat." There was a rumbling, that seemed like a grumbling, and Mr. Bledsoe broke out: "Sculpture? who talks of sculpture? It is dead. It died with Flaxman. Bah! Get me some tea."

"I told you he would speak," said the first lady to her friend. "Will no one bring him some tea?"

"Where is the rude strength of Assyria?" went on Mr. Bledsoe. "Where is the massive grandeur of Egypt? Where is the soft voluptuousness of India? Where is the ineffable commingling of religious and artistic sensibility of Greece? Faugh! Show me a living sculptor. Where is the divinity of Phidias, the lofty beauty of Praxiteles, the majesty of Michael Angelo, the purity of Canova, the fire of Da Vinci, the long-drawn grace of Benvenuto Cellini, the intermittent splendour of Thorwaldsen, the incomparable designing of Flaxman? Where is all this?"

There was no reply, until a young lady, with her hair very low on her forehead, said in hollow tones, that "the grave of insatiable Time had closed over it."

"It is no matter," said Mr. Bledsoe. "It is gone, and there's an end. The genius of the plastic arts has fled—let no one deny it, for I will not tolerate him. You will tell me, it is a matter of climate. I answer, Bosh! Winckelmann has said it! Winckelmann was an ass. Had not Sparta the same climate with Athens? Where is the art of Sparta? Tut! Will no one bring me any tea?"

A lady in blue spectacles here made a gallant effort to clear a path to the tea-table, but without success.

"Is it any longer an ideal art?" continued Mr. Bledsoe, waxing very angry with an imaginary opponent. "I say it is not. They have no longer an exalted guiding principle.

They leave religion out. There is no true sculpture without religion. Do they understand anatomy? No, they do not. Which of them can classify the muscles of my leg?"

A vigorous movement of that limb occasioned some disturbance amongst Mr. Bledsoe's nearest listeners, but he did not notice it, and went on.

"Show me a work of any living sculptor before which I can meditate with my eyes closed for at least an hour. Set it before me now. Ha! you can not do that. I know it. I will never write another line on art while I live."

"He does not really mean that, you know," whispered the lady who had first spoken to her companion. "He will go on writing just as usual. And he is really the most kind-hearted man imaginable. All the artists adore him. If some one would now bring him a cup of weak tea, without any sugar, which has an injurious effect on his teeth, he would calm down at once."

"Give me," began Mr. Bledsoe, again; "give me—"

"A cup of tea, Mr. Bledsoe?" said Horace, approaching him, with a cup in his hand.

"Ah, Racy, how d'ye do? Yes, I've been wanting that for a long time. Where's the 'Nymph'? Is that she in the corner? Ah! very good, very good indeed. Ladies, we must come and look at this. Well, now, upon my word, this is excellent."

And as Mr. Bledsoe sipped his tea he explained to his admirers his reasons for supposing that Horace would shortly inaugurate a new golden age of sculpture.

"Who is that gentleman? Is he one of the critics?" whispered Nell to Mrs. Harte.

"Hush; not so loud, dear. Yes, it has been agreed to call him one. He is one of the nicest old gentlemen in the world, and buys a great deal."

A group of three or four young ladies were drinking tea in a corner of the room, and criticising the company.

"Who is that tall, rather jolly-looking girl with auburn hair, talking to the girl who sang?" asked one of them.

"I don't know, but she seems to be quite at home here," said another. "I saw her chaffing that funny little Tipto of the *Pen and Palette*, just now."

"Oh, don't you know her?" asked a third. "She's the coming sculptor."

"How do you know that?" inquired the first young lady.

"Why, she's the girl Julian Harte has taken up. He found her somewhere or other—on a door-step, or in the Park or the streets—I don't know where; selling plaster of Paris busts of Shakespeare and those people. She said she'd made them all herself, and to prove it she made a life-size bust of Harte himself straight off."

"In the street?"

"Yes, or the Park, or wherever it was."

"But I don't think she could do that, you know. I don't think any one could."

"Oh, but she did. The thing is in Harte's studio now, with the whole story written on a panel underneath."

"It sounds rather funny, doesn't it?" said the first young lady.

"Very," said the second. "But she looks a jolly sort of girl, and she hasn't a bad figure, only she might improve it; I don't believe she wears stays."

"It's all quite true that I've told you," said the third speaker. "And look, she's talking now to that immensely handsome clergyman, whose bust Mr. Monteith is doing. He came in a quarter of an hour ago, and didn't speak to any one till he saw her. He's the one who works in the East End, you know; has a parish nearly full of murderers, and all the rest are thieves, His cook is a returned convict. They say he's a Communist, and wears a hair shirt; but he looks as if he had more sense. I wish our curate was as good-looking. They seem on very good terms, don't they?"

"This scene is as new to you as it is to me, I suppose," said Lyne, when he had carried a chair and a cup of tea to Nell in a retired part of the studio.

"Yes," said Nell, "I think it great fun; but I am afraid it will be rather tiresome to you?"

"Oh dear, no. I'm not such a hermit as that. It is something to me to see a crowd of people who wear good clothes and look as if they had enough to eat. They don't come out holiday-making in this cheerful fashion in my part of the world. I wish they did."

"Are there no holidays there?" asked Nell.

"Oh, yes; now and then. But we havn't taught them

how to use holidays yet. There are lots of empty days too but an empty day, to a man who wants work, is not the same thing as a holiday."

"No, indeed. I have known what an empty day means; but I suppose it means something much worse to some of those people?"

"An empty day to them means oftener than not an empty cupboard and an empty grate—two things that you and I, Miss Haffenden, find it hard to realise, and would find it harder still to accept,"

"I often wonder," said Nell, "that men are found equal to the task of trying to remedy things in a world where almost everything seems to be what it ought not to be. I think there is no such missionary work anywhere as that which you and your fellow-workers are doing in the East End. It wants more courage than I am able to imagine."

"Not so much courage as patience, I think," laughed Lyne. "You must not exaggerate our dangers. They are not savages, you know, amongst whom we work. They are people for whom the social pressure has been too much. They have perhaps, in the first instance, been a little careless of themselves and their rights; they have never learned the secret of joining their forces, of combining to make the best terms for themselves; they have let the employer get too tight a hold on them. In bad times they have been thrust to the wall, with no power of appeal or of remedy. They have herded together, or been driven together, in such vast masses that the markets where they sell their labour have been overstocked, and their labour has lost value. They have had to slave for a day, or a day and a half, to earn the produce of half a day's labour. It goes without saying, that in the course of time all this has bred a good deal of discontent, to say nothing of misery and want. The over-worked and underpaid labourer, when his eyes begin to be opened to his state, looks about him, and sees a great many people enjoy life without working at all. This gives him the notion that something is wrong somewhere. He sees, besides, in his own world of labour that when, as the saying goes, 'trade looks up,' his wages don't, as a rule, increase; but that when trade falls away

they are pretty certain to diminish. Here is another thing that doesn't seem to him to be part of a proper order of nature; and when these facts have sunk down in his mind and rankled there, he is already well on the road to radicalism, republicanism, socialism, or what you will."

"And no great wonder, and not much blame, I should think," said Nell.

"And that is not by any means all," went on Lyne. "Besides the difficulties of the labouring population, there are the difficulties of the criminal population, for you know, Miss Haffenden, crime is an established and an extensive and—in the eyes of its conductors—quite a legitimate business in my neighbourhood; though, as far as I can see, the settlement of the first set of difficulties would go a long way toward the settlement of the second."

"I can't have my hostess monopolised in this way, Frank," said Horace, interrupting the pair, who had ensconced themselves comfortably in the remotest and darkest corner of the studio. "And as hostess, Nell, you have been a scandalous failure. You haven't given tea to anybody but Frank here, you haven't glorified me or my works to a single individual, and you haven't let me introduce any one to you. You haven't even been to see our friend in the antechamber, who is administering the wines in the most glorious style. He'll set you an example."

"You are a wicked libeller," said Nell. "I have made myself agreeable to a gentleman of the press, and given four cups of tea to Mr. Bledsoe, who has promised me my own price for my first statue. But let us go and see Mr. Gripp."

For an hour past there had been a gradual thinning of the gentlemen in the studio, it having been bruited amongst them that Horace had set out some very choice vintages in the anteroom, which were presided over by a genial gentleman with waxed moustache and a stiff leg, who was quite a storehouse of information on the subject of alcoholic stimulants.

Indeed, whenever a lull came in the general conversation in the studio something mysterious of this sort was heard from the other room:

"Hum! If it were my own wine I wouldn't talk about it; but this is a vintage of which kings and the great of the earth have made presents to each other." Or:

"Oblige me by inhaling the bouquet before you sip it. Place it at a distance of an inch from your nose. I say from your nose." Or:

"Is there no lady to whom I can offer a glass of this Sauterne? Teresa, who is a woman of a singularly fine judgment, is of opinion that this is the only lady's wine in existence." Or:

"Ha! Don't be afraid of it. Haut Brion is a wine which gratifies the head while it respects the—hum—stomach."

But there was no getting near Joe at this time, for the room was packed to suffocation.

"There's an Amphitryon for you," said Horace.

"I am afraid he has been getting some dreadfully expensive wines," said Nell, as they stood at the door of the room and watched Joe drawing corks, with a very red face, and carefully expounding the merits of each new bottle. "He does so enjoy buying wines."

"He has bought the best he could get," answered Horace. "I told him to."

The afternoon wore on into the evening, and Horace's friends began to take their departure. Toward seven o'clock, Harte and Mrs. Harte, with Lyne, Mabel, and Nell, were the only ones remaining. Joe was "on duty" at home that evening, and had already vanished. Nell having said that she must take charge of Mabel, the Chief and Mrs. Harte returned to the Abbey, and the four young people were left together.

Horace was assisting Mabel with her cloak. He was skilled in cloaking ladies.

"I am going to take Mabel home," said Nell. "Horace, you had better come with us. It's quite dark."

"Mr. Monteith has kindly offered to do so," put in Mabel. "But I don't think we ought to trouble him. I'm not a bit afraid with you, Nell."

"Oh, Horace is very fond of walking—aren't you, Horace?"

"It is one of my keenest delights," replied that lazy gentleman.

"If you would let me, I would go with you," said Lyne. "It is a week since I promised to visit one of Miss Fawcett's friends at St. Mary's."

"Come by all means," said Horace with alacrity; "four will make a party."

CHAPTER XXV.

WALKING HOME—A FACE IN THE DARK.

It was a keen dark night; there was a smell of winter in the air, and the ground was touched with frost.

Horace put himself by the side of Mabel, and they went on in front, Nell and Lyne following. Horace and his companion appeared to find their tongues at once, and were soon talking freely, but Lyne and Nell walked together in silence for awhile. Then he began to talk to her about her work, and, having found a subject which interested both of them, they were no longer at a difficulty for words.

"I hope one may say that you are fairly launched now," observed Lyne.

"Launched, perhaps," answered Nell, "but nothing more. I have the voyage to make yet."

"But you are not wishing it over, I am sure."

"Oh, no, not at all; indeed, I am rather aggrieved that I haven't met with a single storm."

"Ah; they are not to be wished for, though I admire your courage, if you will let me say so."

"I do not know about courage," replied Nell thoughtfully, "because I do not consider that it has been fairly tried so far. I feel that I should like it to be," she added earnestly. "I do not want to play at working, and until I have met with real difficulties and put them behind me, I shall not believe much in my own courage." They became silent again. The sympathy between these two was deepening rapidly, a sympathy which sprang at first from the conviction that they had a good many thoughts and aspirations in common. They were both strong and arden

natures; each loved work for its own sake, no less than for the end to which it might be directed. There were qualities in them that inspired confidence in each other. Each was capable of taking up and following a purpose, and neither could live without an ideal.

Nell's ideal at present was an artistic one; Lyne's a humanitarian; but the girl was not so wholly engrossed by her own work that she could not feel a strong warm sympathy with the man's, which seemed to be so much wider and nobler than hers.

She admired him for his devotion to his calling; he admired her for her hopeful energy and her woman's gift of appreciation.

He was thinking: what a world of strength a man would have in the companionship of a woman like this.

He put the thought into different words, and spoke it half aloud and almost unconsciously, and said: "How I wish I could have the help of such a fearless coadjutor in *my* work!"

Nell felt the blood rise warmly in her cheeks, and a sudden movement in the region of her heart. But she answered quietly:

"Surely *you*, who have already fought a way over such rough ground, do not distrust yourself?"

"No," he said, "I do not distrust myself, but I could do a great deal more if——" He checked himself suddenly and paused as though remembering somewhat, and the sentence was left unfinished. Nell did not ask him to finish it, and silence fell on them again, but it was a sympathetic, not an embarrassed silence.

"There is such a great deal that a woman—a lady, could do which I shall always fail in, which any man must fail in," began Lyne again after a time, dropping with an effort into the parochial tone and manner. "I have seen a little of woman's work and influence amongst the roughest of my people, and it has made me long for more of them in the field."

There was another short spell of silence, and this time it was broken by Nell.

"You have no sisters, then, who would help you?" she said.

"Yes, and no," he answered with a smile. "I *have*

sisters, but they would not help me. They do not feel a call to the East; in fact, if the truth be told, they would rather that I had never felt a call there either. They would prefer my joining their friends in the West to joining mine in the East."

Nell did not like to ask for further information on the point, but she said presently:

"If it were possible for me, in the little leisure I have, to be of any service, I should greatly like to help. I don't know what I could do, but I have the will at any rate."

"Thank you," said Lyne simply. "Perhaps I may ask for your help sooner than you expect."

Just then they reached the convent, at the little postern gate of which Horace and Mabel were waiting for them in animated conversation.

"A wager! a wager!" exclaimed Horace, as they came up. "Miss Fawcett has been prevailed on to lay a wager with me that she will sing in oratorio at the Albert Hall before I sell my 'Nymph' for a thousand pounds."

"It isn't at all a fair one on his side," said Mabel, "because the statue is finished, whereas I am not yet out of the School." Horace had certainly managed to draw Mabel out of her shyness, and as for her laying a wager, I don't think she could have known the very meaning of the term before it had been expounded by him.

"Oh, you'll win, Mabel, never fear," said Nell. "Mr. Bledsoe and the Duke of Westminster are the only persons in England who buy statues, and the duke is going to buy Mr. Harte's, and Mr. Bledsoe is going to wait for mine."

"There, Miss Fawcett, you see I couldn't possibly have designed to entrap you," laughed Horace.

"I will let you off, if you like," said Mabel, with a serious simplicity that made the others laugh too.

"No, it shall stand," said Horace, with a magnanimous flourish. "Let the consequences be what they may."

Having seen Mabel within the convent portals, the two men started to go home with Nell. They were talking about the success of Horace's "At Home," Nell walking on the inner side of the pavement, with Lyne beside her, and Horace on the outside, when a man crossed from the other side of the street, approached them, looked hard at Nell, and turned off again. Nell was in a gay mood, and turning

from one to another of her companions as she led rather than joined in the conversation, she did not observe the ugly look of the intruder; she had not, indeed, noticed the man at all. Presently he turned about, retraced his steps, and walked on past Nell and her escort for a distance of fifty yards or so, when he again faced about, and, meeting them, stopped for an instant and seemed about to speak. They were in a dark, ill-lighted street, but were just passing a lamp, which threw a glare on the features of the man. His action in stopping drew the eyes of the three to him. Nell alone recognised him, and started as she did so. She would have stopped in her turn, but the man noted her glance of recognition, and, seeming to have gained his end, went on again. In a few moments Nell's protectors had brought her home, and, leaving her on the steps, said good night, and went their own way.

"Foolish fellow!" said Nell to herself, when she was in her own room; "why couldn't he have stopped and spoken in a sensible manner, instead of glaring in that melodramatic way and going off without a word? Really, Martin is behaving in a very silly style; I wish he would go home again."

Alas! going home had no part at all in that scheme with which Martin was occupied just then.

"I think you're going too fast, Nell," he said in his sullen jealousy, as he turned his steps homeward after that encounter in the street. "Two fine fellows is rather more than a girl of your raising wants to look after her. I'd cast about for a sweetheart more of my own station, if I were you; I would indeed, Nell. Anyhow, I'd know who I was, and what I'd got to fall back upon, before I played high like that. Ah! I would so," said Martin slowly, and went on muttering to himself, as he walked sulkily home to his lodgings.

CHAPTER XXVI

SOME CURIOUS REMINISCENCES.

THE old man Garrick was waiting for him there. These two, the one a conscious, the other an unconscious plotter, had held a good many meetings in Martin's room since their first chance encounter in Covent Garden. Martin had found a tool in the old super, with which he expected to do some mischievous work in the future. The ground of their relation was this: Martin had discovered that in Garrick's native village in Essex there had lived, some twenty or three-and-twenty years before, one Sarah Haffenden, whom he did not doubt to be the same that had held the cottage on his farm in the latter years of her life. In the village in Essex she had lived to middle age, a thrifty, well-looking woman, bearing a high character for honesty and virtue, and both liked and respected by her neighbours. Then there had come a sudden change. An event occurred which lost Sarah her place in the good esteem of the village, and one day she disappeared from her home, in circumstances which left no doubt in the minds of the neighbours that their good faith in her had been misplaced. To this point in his story Martin had brought the narrator, and he was now impatiently waiting to get at the mystery involved in the disappearance of Sarah.

But the old man was not to be hurried in his recital. He liked to give it slowly, bit by bit; he liked to feign an entanglement, so that he might have to go back a step or two; he would not accelerate his pace, let Martin press him as he might.

With a view to loosening his tongue, Martin primed him with whisky, but this was a method which had its disadvantages; for the spirit, unless carefully administered, began by setting his mind adrift, and not infrequently ended by silencing him altogether.

"Well, Mr. Play-actor," said Martin, as he entered, "what's the news with you to-night? You look a bit glum. Got anything on your mind?"

"A weight, sir; a weight here," said the old man, striking himself on the chest as he repeated his favourite formula.

"Well, take a drop of something to lighten it," said Martin, filling a couple of glasses as he spoke. "What is it to-night—anything fresh?"

"If they'd gone through the whole of Noah's ark they couldn't have found a worse beast," exclaimed the old man sadly.

"What, the elephant again?" said Martin; and the little super groaned by way of reply. "Well, damn the elephant!" said Martin briefly.

"You can't damn an elephant off-hand like that. I wish you could," responded Garrick gravely.

"Well, let's get rid of him for to-night, anyway. There, take down a drop of that; it'll sweeten your fancy," and he pushed one of the glasses across the table.

The old man drank with a gurgling sound until he had emptied half the glass; then he set it down, his tongue loosened and his eye brighter.

"The joy! the comfort! the polestar! the bride! the universal balm! the key that opens—Mr. Clymo, sir, you are quite right. Damn the elephant!" said Garrick, with a sudden access of cheerfulness.

"That's the style; now let's get on with the story."

"It seems to me," said Garrick, fingering his glass with a meditative air, "that I was a little bit astray last time. Better go back a step or two and make things clearer."

"Now, none of that, partner," said Martin. "You were as clear as day. I've got it all here," tapping his forehead. "You left off at Sarah clearing out of your village. What I want to know is, why she went. What was the mystery?"

"The mystery, sir," said Garrick slowly, "was a child!"

"Whew-w-w!" ejaculated Martin, with a long-drawn whistle of astonishment. "A child!"

"A mewling, puking child. Not but what it was a fair one, though—so they all said that saw it; but when Shakespeare runs in my head, I must out with him."

"Well, get on, man, get on," said Martin impatiently. "What comes next?"

"It runs on thus, sir, as I remember: 'And then, the whining schoolboy, with his satchel——'"

"No, hang it! I don't want your stage play; I want your story. I mean, what followed after the child?"

"A pretty sight of mischief, I can tell you."

"Ah! A bit of a scandal for the neighbours, eh?"

"A blight on all the neighbours!" exclaimed the old man, who was growing a little quarrelsome in his liquor. "A pack of foul-mouthed gossips. What says Coriolanus? 'I hate their stinking breath.' What a man was Macready in *Coriolanus*! I say there was a pretty sight of mischief about that child."

"Good; but let's get a little clearer about it. Tell me just how it came."

"I'll tell you, young man, just as it fell. Sarah was a good woman. I'll stand to that, for all the neighbours. Well, one day she left the village, and was away a goodish bit. That wasn't like her, for Sarah was none of your gadabouts; and it made a bit of gossip. They said the carrier left some sort of a parcel for her the night before she went; but I don't know the rights of that, or whether, supposing he did, it had anything to do with her going. Anyhow, she went away—went quietly one night, and was gone as you might say before any one knew her door was shut. How long she was gone I don't call to mind. Not a great while, I expect, though it might have seemed longer, because, you see, it was altogether a queer thing for Sarah to do. Well, she came back; and the first thing you knew of was this child, mewling, as I said, and puking too, in Sarah's front parlour, and Sarah nursing it as if she'd done nothing else all her life. That was Sarah's mysterious mystery, sir."

"A queer business," said Martin. "Was it a boy or a girl?"

"It was a girl child—a mewling——"

"All right, mewling and puking. But whose child was it? That's the principal thing, after all."

"Well, Sarah gave it out it was her niece, the child of her only brother, who had been drowned at sea some two or three months before; his wife was a delicate young thing, and just pined away after her husband's death, only living to give birth to little Nell——"

"Nell," interrupted Clymo, "was that the child's name?"

"That's what Sarah used to call her, though I'm doubtful whether Nell was her baptized name."

"Well, I don't see why Sarah should be driven from her home by her brother's child."

"Nor I neither," replied Garrick, absently emptying his glass and standing it bottom upward before Clymo, who was too intently interested in Garrick's talk to notice his glass. "Nor I neither," he repeated slowly.

"What was it, then?" asked Clymo.

"Well, you see," replied the old man drowsily, for he was growing sleepy, "it got whispered about that the child was not her brother's at all, but her own; and Sarah wore no wedding-ring."

Clymo gave another whistle before he asked:

"But didn't she try to set matters right?"

"Not she; a proud woman, Sarah just let their idle tongues wag—that's what she did."

"Maybe she could do no other."

"Maybe she couldn't, and maybe she could. No one can say now. Sarah was one to hold her head high. Not but what I think she was wrong to quit the village. I wouldn't have done that, Sarah; I'd have stayed and faced it right through."

"Come now, d'ye think she'd have gone off like that, if the child had been an honest one?" said Martin.

"You'll get no bad opinion of Sarah Haffenden out of me, young man," replied the old man emphatically. "That's what the folks said down our way, I know; but they'd turn against their own daughters in a case like that—rot 'em!"

"You can't say, though, that it wasn't a queer thing for

her to quit her native village and her home in that way, when two words from her might have cleared up everything —how do you answer that?"

"I answer it this way, sir; that it was Sarah's business, and nobody else's. That's the way Sarah looked at it, and that's the way I look at it."

"Where did she go?"

"Northward, they said."

"Northward, eh? And took the child with her?"

"D'ye think she'd leave it behind her?"

"Did she never go back?"

"Not a step. Sarah wasn't that sort."

"You said she was never married, didn't you?"

"She was never married. She never would marry; though she might have done fifty times over if she liked."

"Had sweethearts, had she?" queried Martin.

"Bushels. I was one of 'em myself; though not a boy at that time, neither. But, save your soul! Sarah just threw her eye over us, and went by, as you might say, on the other side."

"Ah—h!" said Martin. "Never married; bushels of sweethearts, and then this mewling, puking child——"

"I say there's nothing proved about that child. I'll stand to it, it was an honest one," broke in Garrick.

"And left the village suddenly, and went back no more," pursued Martin. "Mr. Play-actor, I like this story of yours. Come up again when you've another night to spare, and we'll have a bit more chat about it."

As Martin generally dismissed his visitor in this style, the old man took the hint that the sitting was over for that night, and picking up his hat and straightening himself, made his dramatic bow, and his exit from the room backward.

Left alone, Martin drew his chair to the fire and sat there for a long while, his eyes half-closed, and a curious smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

"It hangs well together," he said at length. "There are good cards in this. Nell, my girl, don't you hold your head too high. Ah-h, whose child was that, I wonder—was it Sarah's own? and if 'twas, how about the swell lovers?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

"IS THERE ANY ONE SHE LOVES?"

DURING the next few days, Lyne was in a state of much perplexity. He felt that a change was taking place in himself, and yet he hardly dared to acknowledge it, because of the pledge by which he deemed himself bound in regard to Horace. But it was not on account of himself and his deepening regard for Nell, but on account of Nell and Horace, that he was perplexed just now.

He had noted, and been greatly surprised by, the emphatic attentions which Horace had paid to Mabel on the occasion of the "At Home." Lyne had made up his mind that Horace was to fall in love with Nell, and Nell with Horace. He had thought it probable, indeed, until that afternoon in the studio and the walk to the convent in the evening, that they had fallen in love with each other already; in which circumstances he was naturally somewhat scandalised by what appeared to him to be a sudden and altogether unwarrantable change of front on the part of Horace.

There had, it is true, been no confidences between the men on this subject; but Lyne could see nothing whatever to interfere with the reasonableness of the conclusion he had come to; and being clear in his own mind as to the course that Horace should pursue, he was vexed at a departure from it, which seemed to show his friend in the light of a trifler.

Although in point of age there was no very great difference between them, they had always, since their friendship began, stood to each other in the relation of

elder and younger brother; Horace had looked up to Lyne as the stronger and wiser nature of the two; Lyne had taken on himself some sort of responsibility in regard to Horace.

This relation was stronger in the early days of their friendship, when they were thrown more closely and constantly together than they had been in recent years; but the tie then formed had never been severed, nor had either of them ceased to acknowledge it.

Lyne took the opportunity of his next visit to the studio, to sound Horace on the point about which his misgivings had arisen.

Horace heard him out, and then made his defence.

"Quite right of you to speak, old boy," he said, "because if you really fancied I had been acting that sort of part, I must have appeared an unmitigated rascal. But the truth is, Frank, you're off the lines entirely. There's no chance for me in that quarter, and I've known it for months past. You shall have the whole story, Frank, if you like; only sit still, whatever you do, for we have arrived at the critical point. I'm putting in the expression. Well, I fell in love—steady, now, steady; if you move, you'll undo the labour of a week. Where had I got to?"

"You had fallen in love—at least you said so."

"A very proper distinction, Frank. It is a matter on which a man may err grievously. I erred myself. Nell—Miss Haffenden, you know, has a fine skill in discovering the marks of love, and she did not discover them in me. Consequently, we were both of us bound to believe that they were not there, and that I was not in love at all. She said so, plainly; and added that she was not in love with me."

"Good heavens! Frank," he went on, "what a world of misery might be avoided if every affair of this sort were settled with the simple and beautiful candour with which Miss Haffenden settled ours! 'You don't love me, and I am not in love with you.' Incline your head a trifle and look bland. You see when one or other of the parties has said what Nell said to me, there is really nothing more to say."

"And did it end there?"

"It ended there. One of your foolish fellows would

have gone on protesting for two hours, and would probably have ended by quarrelling with the lady outright. But I, who am further removed from a fool than most men, did nothing of the sort; for when Nell had put the matter in her way, I saw at once that it could not be put in any other way; so we left off love-making before we had begun, and swore friends. Now you may get down and stretch yourself for five minutes."

"But one or both of you might change your minds at some time, and what then?" said Lyne, as he got down from the sitter's pedestal, and began to pace the studio.

"Neither one nor the other of us will do that," replied Horace, blotting out and remaking one of the short crisp curls on the forehead of his bust. "We have found out that the relation of chum is a very pleasant one, and we don't mean to disturb it."

"Then Miss Haffenden is—is quite free, Racy?"

"Free as a swallow. Now get up on the pedestal again, and let us finish."

Horace worked in silence for five or ten minutes, and then he said: "Frank, you've questioned me, and must submit to be catechised in your turn. Are *you* in love with Miss Haffenden?"

"I believe I am," answered Lyne.

"Good; you haven't said a better thing this year. But *I* 'believed' it in my case, you know. It isn't enough to believe."

"Well, then, I know it."

"Ah! there speaks the man. I wonder whether Miss Haffenden would find the marks in you, Frank?"

"I don't suppose it would occur to her to look."

"H'm!" said Horace sententiously.

"Racy," said Lyne, with a curious, wistful look on his face, "do you think there is any man in the world that she cares about—I mean—well, you know in what way I mean?"

"I think there is one man she *might* care about," said Lyne.

"Then there is one very fortunate man in the world," said Lyne.

"What do you mean to do, Frank?" asked Horace, after another pause.

"What should I do?"

"What does any man do?"

"You remember what I said to you before, when you asked me why I didn't marry?" said Lyne.

"Yes, but you weren't in love then."

"I was beginning to be."

"Bless the parson! A downright case of love at first sight," exclaimed Horace.

"I believe it was," answered Lyne simply. "Years ago," he added, "I said that I would never marry——"

"We all say that in the beginning," interposed Horace.

"Perhaps so; but I had a better reason for it than some. I meant to live for my work. Well, I have worked hard, and am fonder of my work than ever; but it has not prevented me from falling in love."

"It never prevents any man, who has any sense in him," said Horace.

"I won't dispute it; but it is one thing to be in love, Racy; it is another thing to know that the path is smooth before you."

"'The course of true love——'" began Horace.

"Yes, yes; I know that," said Lyne. "But it runs smoother for some than for others. You now, Racy, are cut out for the part of the successful lover. You are handsome; you have a glib tongue, and a genial style; and you are fairly launched in a profession in which there is probable fame, and possible wealth. Mine is a different case."

"My dear fellow," said Horace, "lay this flattering unction to your soul—that I would not like to have you for a rival. Good looks—gammon! Style—bosh! Profession—rubbish! You are as good as I am in any one of those particulars; and better."

"What would you have me to do, then?" asked Lyne. "Shall I go to her, and say, 'I am a parson with a small stipend, and a hundred a year of my own. I work all day long (when my friend Racy does not seduce me to his studio) in a filthy East End parish. My intimates are the scum and outcasts of London society; I am hail-fellow-well-met with professional thieves, returned convicts, and abandoned women. I run the risk every day of a dozen horrible diseases. I live in a narrow street where

every house is the pattern of the other, and all are ugly alike; where the sun is hardly able to shine, and there is neither leaf nor flower, from one end to the other. Will you be my wife, and share this life with me?' Would that be the way to woo her?"

"My friend," said Racy quietly, "you do not know Nell Haffenden, if you think that the prospect of a hard or an ugly life would keep her from marrying the man she loved."

"Do you believe that, Racy?" said Lyne eagerly, with a flush on his face.

"Believe it! I know it! Besides, Frank, you've laid it on too thickly. The picture isn't as black as that, you know. You have prospects as good as the rest of us. You're a rising man; you won't be an East End vicar to the end of the chapter. Hang it, man, you'll be a bishop one of these days, and wear gaiters and a hat with a ridiculous brim, and oppose the Sunday opening of museums in the Lords!"

"You're laying it on now, Racy," laughed Lyne. "But you haven't helped me much, after all. I think I was a fool to fall in love."

"I think you were," said Horace, "if this is how you mean to act the part. I perceive, my friend, that you will require a great deal of coaching in this business. You had better put yourself under my tuition. You shall play Orlando to my Ganymede. I will put you through your paces; and as you have sat up there long enough for to-day, you may take an easier attitude, and we will have the first lesson at once."

"Racy," said Lyne, impetuously springing from his pedestal, and going close to his friend, "let us change places for a while. Let me be the sculptor; give me your studio. I would make her come and sit to me; we would be together all day long, she and I; and, day by day, I would tell her of my love. Were she as marble, I would make her hear and answer me, as Pygmalion did his Galatea. Bah; what a fool I am; I do not know what I say. Racy, I believe that no man ever was in love as I am."

"I wish she were behind the scene there to hear you," said Horace. "My dear fellow, you must forgive me; you

want no coaching. If I were about to fall in love myself" (Horace blushed a little as he said this), "I would take you for my teacher. But what you have said is nonsense. You must have no sham character, and you must make your own opportunity. But you have the wit for that, I think."

But Lyne's unwonted outburst left him rather abashed; and he spoke with a downcast air, as he answered.

"I have no wit at all. I know what I want to say, but if I were face to face with her I should never say it. I am Pagan enough to be more than half-inclined to pray to Venus for her help."

"In sooth, you might do worse, but I'll pray to her for you," laughed Horace. "Shall I tell my comrade of this, Frank?"

"In God's name, no!" said Lyne, with such a genuine look of alarm that Horace laughed again. "No, let it be between ourselves, Racy; at least, for the present. Perhaps I live in a fool's paradise—who knows? But I would not be driven out of it yet awhile, as I might be if what we have talked about should reach her ears. To think, Racy, that a desolate drudge of a parson, who, six months ago, hadn't one notion what love meant, should be brought to this case! Well, I'm glad I've told *you*, any way."

"I'm glad you have, too, Frank; but 'desolate drudge' be hanged! I shall see you a thriving lover before a month is out."

"You shall have half my first year's salary as bishop, if you prove a prophet," laughed Lyne as he took up his hat and went out.

What should he do with this love of his? It was the most real fact he had encountered in his whole life; and yet he feared to tell it lest it might yield him nothing but defeat and bitterness. He hardly dared to think of himself as the lover of Nell Haffenden; he did not believe there was a man in all the world who was worthy of that high place. He could not fancy himself making love to her: it seemed so bold a task.

He tried to imagine that he had actually told her of his love; thought of the place that he would choose to tell it; of the words that he would use, and strove to frame for himself the answer that she would make him. But his

fancy could not reach as far as that; it failed him when he tried to answer himself as he would have her answer him.

He thought again of the life to which he was pledged, the life of his own choice, and his desire; and told himself that it was not one which he could ask such a girl as Nell to share. He remembered her love for her own work; contrasted hers with his—the one so colourless and cold (at least from the artist's point of view), the other full of the warmth and light that surround the artist life as with a halo. Was it possible that she should exchange hers for his? Was it possible that both should be united? Could she be at once the artist and the wife of the East End parson?

She had shown more than a girlish interest in his work, but might not that have sprung only from the fulness of her sympathies?

So he went on, just like any other new and fearful lover, tormenting himself with a thousand doubts and questions, which he could not solve, but which he had a sort of painful pleasure in arraying before him.

In the face of this strange problem of love he was like a child. It blinded and confounded him; he could not grasp it; it left him quite helpless. It appealed to a side of his nature which had never been developed; for hitherto all that was tender in him had poured itself into his work. He had been the lover of his people only; his heart had beat for them, and for their sorrows, and their wants; he had not thought that the whole of a man's affection could be centred on one single object.

To this conviction he had awakened, almost in an instant; and it was the strangest and the loveliest revelation of his life.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MAIDENS' CHATTER.

LYNE would have given a great deal in those days to open some honest passage to the secret thoughts of Nell.

What was Nell herself thinking about at the time?

She and Lyne had met often of late, but they had never been alone together, or at most only for a few moments or minutes at a time. She had met him at Horace's studio, and at the ragged service, where, with Horace or Mabel, she went from time to time; but nothing of a confidential nature had ever passed between them.

Neither of them was in the least degree sentimental; Nell was in no way disposed to flirt, and Lyne could not have flirted had he tried. She had never thought of him in the character of a lover; found it, indeed, as difficult to do so as he did to think of her in a similar character.

Yet her feelings toward him were very different from those she entertained for Horace, whom she could never regard but as a comrade and companion. There was an almost feminine charm and frankness about Horace, which induced any amount of confidence on the part of such a girl as Nell; and her freedom with him was due in great measure to his own entire freedom with her.

Such a relation is possible only between two very honest natures; but this quality each knew the other to possess in the fullest measure. But Lyne touched, or she sometimes felt that he could touch, a deeper chord in her nature.

Were she to live with Horace day by day under one

roof, to be with him from morning till evening, to work with him, to walk with him and talk with him, from week to week, and month to month, all the year through, she would have been happy enough, but their relations would have undergone no change. Her heart would never beat higher for him, or her pulses move more quickly. It was not in him to sound such depths as there might be in her nature; if she were capable of a passionate love, it would never be in his power to prove it.

All this she knew; but she could not think as quietly of Horace's friend as she always thought of Horace.

As the intimacy ripened between Nell and the young student at the convent, they saw a great deal of each other. Sometimes, in the evening, Mabel was Nell's visitor in that diminutive apartment which she was so proud of, in the new home in Brompton, where by this time Mabel had grown intimate with Teresa, and Teresa's ailments, and Teresa's grandpapa, and Teresa's brother Joe.

At supper-time—supper, like breakfast, was a meal which Teresa always took in bed—Joe laid aside his pipe, and brushed his coat, and bringing his stiff leg from the basement to the dining-room, took the head of the table, and regaled the ladies with stories of wine, and reminiscences of his boyhood. But it happened oftenest that Nell, always with Joe for her squire, went to the convent, where the two girls had long gossips in that delicious little room of Mabel's overlooking the gray old garden, grayer and more sombre than ever in its winter garb.

Mabel's place, during a good part of the evening, was at the piano, where she sang, as often as Nell entreated her, from the old masters and the new; while Nell stretched her comely length on the sofa, and lay with her eyes half-closed or fixed on the beautiful profile of the singer.

"There; I've sung through my entire stock," said Mabel, one evening.

"Then come and let us talk," said Nell, making room on the sofa for Mabel.

"Which of us will be at the top of her tree first, I wonder?" went on Nell.

"You will," said Mabel.

"Boh!" said Nell, laughing, and pinching Mabel's little

pink ear. "Not I. You must be first, you know, or else you will lose your bet with Horace."

"I never meant to make a bet with him, Nell," said Mabel, in an apologetic tone, and looking rather ashamed of that innocent performance.

"But you have made it; and no one can ever get out of a bet," laughed Nell.

"Do you really mean that?" asked Mabel, with quite a scared expression.

"Do you think it will ruin you? How much is it?"

"It isn't money at all," answered Mabel.

"Is it gloves?"

"Oh, no."

"Why, you dreadful child, what in the world have you been betting about?"

"Well, I really didn't mean to, Nell; and I never supposed he was serious when he said it."

"But what is it, you mysterious little body?" persisted Nell.

"Well, Nell, he said that if I lost, I must go and sit for my portrait. Don't laugh like that; of course I never meant to in the least."

"Oh, you goose! And suppose you win?"

"Well, he made it somehow—I don't know how he did it—he made it somehow that I was to go in either case."

"Oh! isn't this delightful?" exclaimed Nell. "You've compromised yourself, you know, you really have."

"Nell, how can you be so cruel? I don't mean to go a bit."

"You must."

"I won't."

"You'll break faith if you don't."

"I never meant it," insisted Mabel, more than half inclined to cry.

"You'll have to go every day for weeks. It takes ever and ever so long to make a bust," began Nell again.

"He said it was to be a full-length," faltered Mabel.

"Why, that means a year — more than a year with Horace, because he's so lazy. And you'll have to go all

alone, Mabel; you can't have any chaperone. None of the Sisters will go, because they wouldn't approve of it; and I can't go, because I'm so busy; and Mrs. Harte can't go, because she's busy too; and Miss Gripp can't go, because she has her ailments. Oh! Mabel, what will you do?" And Nell lay back on the sofa, and filled the room with laughter.

"Nell, you are the biggest tease that ever was. I'll never go near the studio again."

"Sweet," said Nell, stroking the soft hair back from Mabel's forehead, "you shall not punish yourself so sorely. You shall win your bet and have your portrait taken—full-length; or you shall lose it, and have your portrait taken all the same. I will arrange it for you, my Mabel."

"You shall do nothing of the kind; and if you say anything more about it I will quarrel with you; and then we shall not see each other any more, and that would be the worst punishment of all"; and the small figure nestled close to Nell, until the brow of one touched the cheek of the other; and Nell bent lower and pressed her lips against Mabel's, and thought that Horace would have liked to be in her place.

"I wonder, after all," said Nell, going back to the subject from which they had started, "whether either of us will ever get to the top of her tree? What do you think, sweetheart?"

"Are you very anxious to get to the top, Nell?"

"Aren't you?"

"I don't know. I think I might be content with the highest branch but one."

"I used to think," said Nell, "that I must be either at the top or nowhere; that no second place would be worth the having."

"And don't you think so still?"

"Sometimes I do; and then again I think often that one ought not to be ambitious at all, but just go steadily on for the love of the work, and never think about personal glory. That's Mr. Harte's theory."

"It's a very high theory, don't you think so, Nell?"

"Yes; and wants a high nature to follow it. I wish I weren't so ambitious. The people are much happier who

haven't any high-flown notions of wanting to do something great and be famous."

"Oh, those are stupid people. I think there are too many of those already. Nell, is—is Mr. Monteith ambitious?"

"A great deal more so than he pretends," answered Nell.

"I was afraid," said Mabel, with her head still on her friend's shoulder, and fidgeting with the locket at Nell's throat, "that he did not care very much about—about anything."

"You mustn't think that," replied Nell, looking into the trustful eyes of Mabel. "He only pretends that. No artist ever loved his work better than Horace does; and besides, he is so good and loyal."

The soft head pressed the shoulder it lay on, though so lightly, that the pressure was scarcely felt.

"Nell," said Mabel, presently, lifting herself, and looking in her friend's face, "I wonder whether you will ever marry?"

"Gracious!" replied Nell, with mock solemnity; "yes, I suppose I shall, some day. We are born unto it, pigeon, we women."

"Have you ever seen any one you would like to marry, Nell?"

"Hum! That's what Mr. Gripp says. Suppose I were to marry Mr. Gripp?"

"Don't be ridiculous. Would you like to marry some one in your own profession, or in another?"

"Let us weigh the various professions, and think which of them would be likely to furnish the best husband."

"But we only know one profession besides yours and mine," said Mabel, with a look in her gentle eyes that was more cunning than usual.

"What's that one, mouse?"

"The clerical," replied Mabel gravely.

"We don't know many in that profession, either, objected Nell.

"Let us take the one we do know as a sample," said Mabel.

"He is so busy, you know," answered Nell.

"That shows his heart is in his work."

"Perhaps he has no heart for anything else."

"Oh!" said little Mabel, half reproachfully, and half sententiously.

"Puss," said Nell, "we shall talk rubbish if we talk much more. It is time for me to send you to bed, and go home myself. I hope Mr. Gripp hasn't waited all this while."

CHAPTER XXIX.

HORACE HAS A STRANGE THOUGHT.

THE result of this conversation was to send Nell off to Horace, with a purpose not unlike that with which his friend the Vicar had lately visited him.

The relation between Horace and Nell was by this time so well understood amongst the half-dozen friends who alone could have claimed any right of interference, that its propriety had ceased to be questioned. Horace called at Harte's studio to take her out; she looked in on him at his own studio, three, four, or six times a week; he visited her at home; they were out whole evenings together at the theatres, and in fact it had come to be understood that, outside of working hours, wherever Nell was, there Horace would be pretty sure to be also.

"What is this that I hear about you, sir?" said Nell a day or two after her last evening at the convent, when she had gone to lecture him on that iniquitous bet into which he had inveigled Mabel.

"If it's a very serious matter, I could discuss it better with my apron off," replied Horace, preparing to abandon his work.

"You will keep your apron on, though it is a very serious matter indeed," said Nell.

"Why, you're as bad as Frank. It isn't a week since he was here with a face as long as——"

"Then," interrupted Nell, "you have probably been misconducting yourself in more ways than one. What do you mean, sir, by taking advantage of your wicked know-

ledge about betting to entrap Miss Fawcett as you did the other night?"

"Why, Nell, you know," pleaded the culprit, with his laughing features vainly endeavouring to look penitent, "she will be sure to win, and then——"

"Now, no quibbling; you know very well you planned it in such a scandalous way that she couldn't possibly win."

"The laws of betting——" began Horace.

"Are no laws at all. Well, now your wickedness is going to recoil on your own head; Miss Fawcett is quite determined that she will never see you again."

"Good heavens! You don't mean that," exclaimed Horace, now fairly aghast.

"Well, that's her present intention, at any rate. But I haven't done with you yet, sir. You will be good enough to tell me what your intentions are?"

"Have we got to that point already, Nell?"

"Yes, that must be settled at once."

"Well, my confessor," said Horace, seating himself on a low stool opposite to her, with a half-timid and wholly serious look in his frank eyes, "how can I tell the story to you, after that other one like it which I told you such a short while since? You will laugh at me, though I sha'n't mind that, or you will think, perhaps, that I am a light and shallow fellow who is ready to fall in love with every pretty face he sees; which I should not like at all."

"No, Horace, I shall not do either. I should be very sorry if what has been between us in the past were to make us less frank with each other on *any* subject. You were never in love with me, and I knew it; only I shouldn't like you to make a second mistake, for your own sake as well as for the—the—well, whoever it might be."

"If I told you that I were in love with Miss Fawcett, would you believe it, Nell?"

"I think I might do so," answered Nell with a smile.

"Would it displease you?"

"No; I think I should be glad."

"Then please, Nell, tell me if you think that there is any chance for me?"

"I don't know that that would be fair," she answered, though I am afraid that her eyes and the corners of her mouth told more than her lips.

"Between friends, you know," said he coaxingly.

"Well," said Nell slowly, as if she were casting about for an answer that should not compromise her friend; "Miss Fawcett is curious to know whether you are ambitious."

Horace picked up his chisel, and turned half round to the figure he was at work upon.

"And what did you answer, Nell?" said he.

"I said that I thought you were much more ambitious than you seemed to be."

"That was kind of you, Nell," he answered gratefully, though his eyes twinkled as he said it.

"And it is true, Horace, is it not?"

"Why, yes; I don't feel much doubt about it myself. I haven't your energy, Nell, nor Harte's patience; but I know no one who craves for success more than I do. Miss Fawcett would like persons to be ambitious?"

"She would care for no one who was not," replied Nell.

"Suppose," went on Horace, more doubtingly and timidly than was usual with him; "suppose I were to say to Miss Fawcett all that I have said to you, and she were to give me some hope; should I have any one else to fear? Is there a gorgon in the shape of a mamma? Is there an implacable papa who looks to the Stock Exchange or the board of a railway company for a son-in-law?"

"There would be nothing to fear from a papa or a mamma."

"From any one, then?"

"There is a guardian."

"A guardian is sometimes a fearful thing," said Horace dubiously.

"But Mabel's guardian," said Nell, "lives in France; she never sees him—he hardly knows where she is or what she is doing."

"A pearl amongst guardians! What is her story, Nell?" asked Horace quickly, a new thought on the subject seeming to have entered his mind as he spoke.

Nell told the story which the reader has already heard, and Horace listened curiously; though it could scarcely be said from his expression whether the relation pleased him or otherwise.

But it produced a singular change in him, which Nell could not fail to notice.

"What is the matter?" she asked, stopping short in a sentence, just as she had brought the story to a close.

"Did Miss Fawcett herself tell you this story?" answered Horace.

"Yes; why do you ask—is it such a strange story?"

"No, I suppose it is not a very remarkable one; but it has suggested a queer thought to me. Do you know, Nell, it flashed upon me while you were speaking that I had found my lost sister."

"What, in Miss Fawcett?"

"Yes."

"Horace, what a strange thought!"

"Yes, is it not?" said Horace, with a smile, though his manner was very serious.

"Well, Horace, *I* think it is absurd!" said Nell emphatically. "Why, there must be hundreds of girls in London in Mabel's position, and hundreds more in the country, and thousands all over the world!"

"I suppose so," answered Horace; "indeed, I have heard of many such cases in my inquiries; but I never before had such a strong conviction as this."

"Would you like it to be true, Horace?" asked Nell.

"I should like to find my sister," he replied; but did not add, what he hardly could have added, that he would rather find a wife than a sister in Mabel. "Do you think," he said, after a moment's pause, "that there is any likeness between us?"

"Not the least bit," said Nell stoutly. Her own wishes in this matter were of the same colour as Horace's.

"What is to be done, Nell? I mustn't be in love now, you know," went on Horace, rather dolefully.

"I think it is a very foolish notion that you have got hold of," replied Nell, determined not to budge from her position.

"It may be, and it may not be; I can't get rid of it, foolish or not."

Then he began to argue it with her, until by sheer persistency and confidence in his case, he brought her to admit that there was, at any rate, a certain plausibility on his side. But even this small admission she made against her will, and further she would not go.

She left Horace in a mingled state of dissatisfaction and anticipation, and went home.

Horace had made her promise to talk further with Mabel about her history, in such a manner as to keep the difficulty which his conjecture had raised as far as possible out of sight—not an easy task, as she confessed to herself.

Her guesses in respect of Mabel's feelings had been converted almost into certainty during their last talk, and she welcomed the discovery heartily ; for her own sake, and for the sake of her two friends. That two people who had such a close place in her affections should fall in love with each other and marry was an arrangement which she regarded with perfect satisfaction.

Mabel was in most things a very novice. Convent bred, she knew no more of the world than Miranda. Since a child she had had no counsellor more intimate than a Sister Superior; and until a few weeks ago love had been to her nothing else than a name. She saw Horace, and straightway she began to be captivated. A disposition like his must of necessity attract an untutored child-like nature such as hers. There was his handsomeness to begin with, which was not of a common kind, and which had in it something feminine, very likely to appeal to a simple, trustful girl who, not knowing men at all, had created an ideal of a rather dominant and masterful description. Horace, with all his ease and confidence of bearing, had a very gentle way with women—the way of a man who had a natural unfeigned love and reverence for all womankind. Simpleton as she was, touching every matter of mundane experience, an absolute child on her affectionate side, Mabel might have met a score of men, and been moved by none of them. But before Horace—this easy-going, indolent, pleasure-loving artist—she had bent, because she had felt intuitively that there was a side to him which he did not show to the world, and that it was the better side of the two.

Nell was not far wrong in thinking that she knew Mabel's feelings well enough to be sure that that singular notion of Horace's would not be altogether welcome to her. This added a difficulty to the task he had intrusted to her, and she was still further embarrassed by the thought

that Mabel had been unwilling that she should say anything whatever to Horace on this subject; had, in fact, almost pledged her not to do so.

But she had such a strong predisposition against the idea which Horace had taken into his head, and was so extremely desirous to prove him wrong, that she wished for, rather than dreaded, her next meeting with Mabel.

It came sooner than she expected, for while she was cogitating in her room that evening, Mabel walked in, saying that she had felt lonely at home, and that Nell must please talk to her, and give her some supper.

"What made you feel lonely, puss?" asked Nell, running her fingers through the soft silky hair, which all the admonitions of a Sister Superior could never prevail on Mabel to dress with sufficient primness.

"Because it is a fast-day," she answered with a pout, "and all the sisters look so hungry, and religious, and unhappy, and they don't like me to play anything but dismal music, which always makes me wretched. What have you been doing all day, Nell?"

"Well, in the morning I helped Mr. Harte to spoil a beautiful statue of his, and in the afternoon I helped myself to spoil a stupid little figure of my own, and in the evening I went to see Horace."

"What did you go there for?"

"I went to lecture him."

"What about?"

"About you."

"Oh, Nell! and you promised——"

"No, dear, I didn't promise anything."

"Well, you made believe that you did."

"Yes, that was to set your little mind at ease. But I was obliged to scold him all the same, you know; so that he shouldn't do it again."

"Do what again, Nell?"

"Make any more immoral bets with too-confiding young ladies."

"He oughtn't to have done that, ought he?"

"Certainly not; it was most iniquitous; but he won't transgress again."

"Is he—is he frightened, Nell?"

"Dreadfully. He shook in his shoes. I dare say he's doing so still. I don't think he'll be able to work for a week."

"You're laughing, Nell. I believe you've been making the wickedest game of me, you two."

"No, we haven't. Horace wouldn't make any game of you. Mabel," she went on abruptly, "would you like to have Horace for a—brother?"

"For a brother, Nell?" exclaimed Mabel, turning and gazing at her friend with wide-open eyes.

"Sweetheart," continued Nell, not knowing very well how to proceed, and feeling that she had brought matters to a too sudden climax, "I want you to tell me your story again. Are you sure that you have never known any one except your guardian?"

"Quite sure; but I have told you all this before, Nell, why do you want me to go over it again?"

"Do you think that there is any one who knows more of your history than you do yourself?"

"No; what a funny question!"

"No one amongst the sisters; the Superior for instance?"

"No, I am sure of it. But, Nell, why do you ask me this? What has come to you to-night?"

"Mab, do you remember what I told you about Horace, and that lost sister of his?"

The thing sprang into Mabel's mind in an instant, and she saw the end to which Nell's questions were directed. Her cheeks, whose colour was always subdued, became quite white, and her lips blanched.

"Do you believe that it is true?" she said to Nell in a half whisper, and in accents half reluctant and half frightened.

"No, I do not," replied Nell.

"Does he think so?"

"He has taken an extraordinary conviction about it. I never saw him so strongly persuaded about anything before."

"Oh, Nell, it cannot be true, it is impossible," said Mabel, in a sudden passion of tears, and throwing her arms about Nell's neck as she spoke.

"You do not wish it true, my Mabel?" whispered Nell.

"Oh, no, no! You know that I do not," sobbed Mabel. "Does *he*, Nell?"

"I am sure that he does not," answered Nell.

"But what are we to do, Nell? How can we prove it?"

"We will find out; we two. There, there, do not cry, little Mabel. It will come right: I know it will. We will set to work at once, and find out all about it; you and I by ourselves."

CHAPTER XXX.

BROTHER AND SISTERS.

On the same evening; at the moment, indeed, when Mabel was learning from Nell that curious new belief of Horace's, Lyne, sitting alone in his lodgings, received a letter which promised a material change in his prospects.

At this time he was dependent almost entirely on his profession, and so completely were his affections set on that rugged corner of the vineyard, whose soil he tilled laboriously from day to day, that he had neither hoped nor wished for an escape from it to a field where the labour might be lighter and the profits larger. But now, while as fond as ever of that ragged flock of his, in which the white sheep were conspicuous by their fewness, he used to grow very disheartened when he thought how poor was the share of life he had to offer to the woman whom he longed to make his wife. He knew that Nell's sympathies were with him in his work, and yet he did not dare to ask her to be his partner in it; neither could he bring himself to contemplate a change which would remove him from the sphere he was best fitted for. Two separate loves struggled for the mastery; the love of Nell, and the love of his daily work; but the new love gained strength every hour, and the delight of it was the greater because he had known nothing like it before. He read the letter he had just received, and as he did so a new vista opened before him.

It was a lawyer's letter, and it said that the accidental death of a cousin had put him in the place of heir to a

wealthy bachelor uncle, a baronet of old family. If the uncle remained single, and it was scarcely probable that he would do otherwise, for he was well on in the sixties, and had always set his face against matrimony, Lyne would, on his death, succeed to the title and estates.

The letter, in fact, completely reversed his whole prospects. It made him at once a man with a material future. Advancement or no advancement in the Church, he might now fairly hope that want would not come near his door; that he would have a substantial home, in the future, if not in the present, to offer the woman whom he loved.

He ran over again in thought all that had passed between himself and Nell, and wondered whether he should ask her now to be his wife. Then his mind branched off in another direction, and he asked himself with an amused feeling what his sisters would say about it.

On this point he was not allowed to remain long in doubt, for the next morning's post brought a letter from each of those ladies, three parts filled with congratulations, and the remainder with the expression of an earnest hope that as their dear brother's prospects were now so greatly changed for the better (to say nothing of the responsibilities to society which the change involved), he would at once abandon his well-intentioned but scarcely reputable work in the East End, and devote himself to the spiritual well-being of persons in a more interesting sphere of life; in short, that he would immediately seek a living in the West End. Finally, both sisters thought that Frank had better come at once and talk the matter over with them.

Frank's periodical visits to his sisters were duties which he seldom anticipated with eagerness, and in the discharge of which he felt no lively satisfaction. Brother and sisters belonged to different worlds.

The ladies were devout enough, to be sure, but their devotions did not interfere with their debt to society; and when they had been up late on Saturday night, they were apt to oversleep themselves on Sunday morning. They never thought with the poet that the world was too much with them; but they did think that the Church was too much with their brother. They were fond of him, and

proud of his good looks and his talents; but they thought him the most perverse and wrong-headed young cleric in the world.

In money matters they had come off more favourably than he, thanks to a maiden aunt in whose will they had figured; and they rented a *bijou* house in the neighbourhood of Belgrave Square, where they were guarded by a tame dragon in the person of an elderly spinster. In the morning-room of this æsthetic dovecot, in which one had to step gingerly to avoid contact with all sorts of strange and fragile ornaments, the sisters were finishing a midday breakfast when Lyne called upon them.

"He is growing civilised," said Julia, the elder, as her brother entered the room. "He has cut his hair and shaved his beard, and left his umbrella downstairs."

"Sit down here and warm yourself, dear; your poor nose is quite blue," said Lucy, the younger. "Never mind Jule; she's in a dreadful temper. What kind of meal do you look for at this time of day, Frank?"

"You may give me a cup of coffee if you like—nothing else. Now, what have you to say to me?"

"You are always in such a hurry to talk business," said Julia, who was thin and graceful, with a faint complexion, and an irritating droop of the eyelids.

"My dear Jule," answered her brother, "I am here at your own request to talk on a particular subject. Now, pitch into me as hard as you like."

"Well, Frank, you really might look a little smarter at the prospect of a baronetcy," said Lucy, who was fair like her sister, but a good deal shorter, with a dimpled chin, a saucy nose, and a superb set of teeth. "I do believe," she went on, "you'd be quite as happy to grub along all your life a second-rate vicar in the East End."

"On the whole, I believe I should be happier," replied Lyne.

"The man is almost barbaric," observed Julia in a mild tone.

"But," urged Lucy, "you don't really mean to say, Frank, that you're going to poke along there just the same as ever?"

"Just the same, Loo."

"It is shocking," said Julia.

"It is wicked," echoed Lucy.

"To my mind," observed Julia, "it amounts to a positive insult to Providence."

"It is certainly," said Lucy, "a most ridiculous throwing away of opportunities. But he can't really mean it. Just think, Frank, there are heaps of ugly little curates all over London who would do perfectly well for the East End. But for you it is absurd. A face and a figure like yours might work miracles in a West End pulpit. I know twenty of the sweetest girls who would fight for places in your Bible class. There's the living of St. John's just vacant, which would suit you to a nicety. Oh, Frank, what a chance for a crusade amongst the higher classes!"

"The service at St. John's is the most thrilling in London," said Julia; "and no congregation is more devout."

"Copper is almost unknown in the offertory," said Lucy.

"The vestments are lovely beyond everything," said Julia.

"Your sermon need never exceed eleven minutes, and if you would only preach against stays and powder, the women would adore you. And nice women, too, I can tell you. Oh! you needn't turn up your nose. Just think of the girls you could prepare for confirmation!"

"Your arguments are very weighty, dears, and I ought to be seriously impressed by them, but——"

"But you are not, of course," said Julia.

"I am afraid that I am not," answered her brother. "You see, my dear sisters, you have one notion of a parson and his work, and I have another; and somehow the two don't hang together. I should cut a very poor figure in the pulpit of St. John's. You seem to forget that I preached there once, and that half the seat-holders said they would leave the church if I ever preached there again."

"But you were very young then, Frank, and your sermon, which I still shudder to think of, was really almost monstrous," said Julia gently.

"Yes; but the worst of it is that the older I grow, the more monstrous I become. You would faint, both of you—the whole of St. John's would faint if they could hear me preach now."

"Well, Frank, you are a good, persevering boy, and I

rather admire you," said Lucy. "But it is a pity you should think that a clergyman can do no good except amongst burglars and wife-beaters."

"I don't think that, Loo. But there is one kind of parson for one set of people, and another for another set. Now, the burglars and wife-beaters are my peculiar people. I like them. They are a great deal nearer the original man than your friends at St. John's, and most of them improve upon acquaintance. Consequently, as I am very little acquainted with them at present, I don't mean to turn my back upon them. As for the baronetcy, I haven't got it yet, and perhaps never shall."

"You are certain to get it sooner or later," said Julia. "There is not the least probability that Uncle Edward will marry; he could not be so desperately foolish at his time of life. And talking of marrying, Frank, you know that with a title and money in prospect, you ought to be thinking of marriage yourself."

"You are quite old enough now," said Lucy; "and Jule and I are most anxious to see you nicely settled; are we not, Jule?"

"It is almost our chief concern," replied the elder sister, suppressing the least suspicion of a yawn.

"Perhaps I have already thought about marriage," put in Lyne quietly.

"Frank!" exclaimed Julia, rousing herself, and looking at him with genuine alarm. "You give me a cold feeling all over. What can you mean? You have hardly seen a woman in your life."

"I have seen many," replied Lyne.

"Yes, but of what sort? Oh! Frank, this is terrible."

"You have not been frequenting the music-halls, have you, dear?" asked Lucy.

"You surely cannot have been so iniquitously simple as to entangle yourself with a person in the East End?" said Julia, who paled visibly. "Ring for some more coffee, Lucy. I feel like a crisis."

"You are complimentary, you two," said Lyne, who enjoyed the alarm of his sisters. "Do you think I can take no better care of myself than that?"

"After all, you know, you are still very young, Frank," said Lucy, who was three years his junior.

"You said just now that I was quite old enough to marry, Loo."

"Yes, but hardly without the guidance of persons a little more experienced than yourself. Dear Frank, you would not make yourself ridiculous, and disgrace *us*, by a *mésalliance*, would you?"

"It must be broken off immediately," exclaimed Julia emphatically.

Frank lay back in his chair and laughed.

"Gently, Jule," said he; "there's nothing to break off yet."

"Oh! Frank, how you relieve me," said Lucy.

But Julia was not satisfied.

"I should be better pleased, Frank," continued that cautious young lady, "if you would assure us that there is not likely to be anything."

"But a moment ago your anxieties were all the other way," laughed her brother. "You blow hot and cold in the same breath, Jule."

"I don't; but when I said that you should think about marriage, I had no notion that you might be making some irresponsible engagement on your own account."

"Well, I haven't done that, and am not likely to; but I suppose you'll allow me the use of my own judgment."

"In any matter not so grave as this, I should unhesitatingly do so" (Julia was a year older than her brother); "but where your whole future happiness and the honour of the family are so intimately concerned, as in an affair of this kind, I don't think you should do anything without the advice of Lucy and myself. We could not possibly accept a sister-in-law from the East End of London."

"You won't be called on to do anything so humiliating," replied Lyne.

"At any rate, dear," said Lucy, "you might promise not to give yourself away without letting Jule and me have our say on the matter."

"You are pretty sure to have that in any case, Loo. I won't promise anything. Yes, I will: I'll promise that my wife, if I marry, shall be ten times too good for either of you."

"That's fair," said Lucy.

"It is impossible rubbish," said Julia.

"Good!" answered Lyne, with another laugh. "Then we are, as usual, unanimously agreed. And now, if you'll allow me, I will go back to my work."

"Frank," whispered Lucy, as she followed him downstairs, "you really must not do anything stupid. I made out a list last night of some of the jolliest girls I know, who would be delighted to marry a clergyman baronet."

"If you'll let me have the list, Loo, I will give it my most serious consideration. By the way, Loo, there's a fine-looking converted housebreaker in my flock, who'd make you the best hus——"

"Get along with you; you've become quite an odious tease," and the little lady kissed her brother, and pushed him out of the house.

Lyne went home to his lodgings full of a strange nervous excitement. He was unfit for work; he could not even think consecutively; the one idea of a helpless overmastering love possessed him, to the exclusion of every other.

Until now he had managed to hold himself in check; but the sudden promise of riches, which seemed to give him a firmer hold on the future—a control over many circumstances that had appeared too strong for him—loosened the self-imposed restraints, and carried him beyond himself.

Before he went to bed that night, he had formed what he thought was a very bold resolve.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THAT WHICH WAS TO COME.

At about eight o'clock on an early winter's evening the situation in the house in Brompton was generally something like this: Teresa had gone upstairs to her bedroom to prepare her first draught, Nell was in her own sanctum at the top of the house, and Joe was enveloped in his very oldest coat, and a cloud of tobacco-smoke, in his den in the basement.

On the evening with which this chapter is concerned—it was the day after Lyne's visit to his sisters—the situation agreed with this description, save in the one particular that Nell was out of the house, on a visit to her friend at the convent.

At about half-past eight there was a valiant knock at the door, and Teresa, reconnoitring from behind the window-blind, descried a visitor in clerical garb.

"Joseph," she called, "there is a clergyman at the door; let him in."

There was a brief pause, during which Joe held counsel with himself as to the possibility of receiving a clerical visitor in his very oldest coat.

"Joseph," repeated Teresa in a louder key, "is the clergyman to freeze on the door-step, or am I to go to the door myself?"

In a twinkling Joe was in his second-best coat, and had laid a hot coal on his pipe to keep it alive. Then he might have been heard going stiffly up the stairs to the front door.

"Joseph," called Teresa again, "if it should be the

curate from St. Matthias, say that my health does not allow of my becoming a permanent seat-holder. Show him into the front room."

On opening the door, Joe recognised the young clergyman whom he had met at Horace's studio, and who was a friend of Nell's.

"It *is* cold," he said, in response to the first greeting of his visitor. "I don't remember it so cold at this time of year since the winter that Senator Johnson boarded with us. Walk in, please."

"Rather a wrong hour to call, I'm afraid," said Lyne, shaking the snow from his boots, as he came into the dimly-lighted passage.

"Not at all! my sister will take it as quite friendly. Teresa thought you might be the—the assistant minister of St. Matthias, and gave me a message relating to the occupation of a seat and—hum!—her health, which is, I regret to say, not all that could be desired."

"I am sorry," said Lyne. "I had heard from Miss Haffenden that Miss Gripp was an invalid. Is—is Miss Haffenden in?"

"I expect her every minute. It is approaching supper-time, and her appetite, I am glad to say, is an excellent one. We have a boiled fowl for supper. For myself, I prefer it roas——"

"JOSEPH!" in a shrill, indignant whisper from the landing.

"Hum! Foolish, anyway. So indigestible, too. Be seated, Mr. Lyne."

He led the way into the little front sitting-room, which with the help of fire and lamp and the perennial smile of Miss Gripp's grandpapa, was a snug place enough on a winter's evening.

"I say," repeated Joe, "I don't remember it so cold at this time of year since the winter that Senator Johnson boarded with us. The Senator was the smartest hand at euchre——"

"JOSEPH!"

"Hum! Imprudent, to say no more. And a wonderful voice in reading the Psalms. Let me take your coat, Mr. Lyne."

Joe set a chair for his visitor in front of the fire, and cast about for a place for himself. Finally, he took up a

standing position in front of old Mr. Gripp, and warmed his hands in an absent way at the canvas.

There was such a kindly air of paternity about Joe, in spite of his awkwardness, his shyness, and his shabbiness, that, whether or no he were at ease himself, one could not but feel comfortable in his presence. Let him wax and twirl his gray moustache as he would, he could not give the semblance of sternness to his features, whose general expression was one that invited confidences of the most intimate sort. Lyne, whose manner on entering had shown a good deal of nervousness, soon began instinctively to warm toward his host, and before he had been a quarter of an hour in front of the fire he had told Joe the secret of his visit. Joe was in an ecstasy of delight.

"Is it so?" he said, coming forward to take Lyne by the hand. "Upon your honour, now? Yes, I see it in your face. Well, now, to think I should never have guessed it! Will you take anything to keep your courage up? Did I tell you there was a boiled fowl for supper? Why, this will do Teresa more good than a gallon of physic! I'll go and tell her. Eh? Well now, why, hum! Oh! God bless me, this is immense!"

And Joe, in a fever of nervous delight, shuffled out of the room and up the stairs to where Teresa stood severely, in her bedgown, on the landing.

At this moment Lyne's listening ear caught another step without—a light and rapid step, treading the snow on the pavement, pausing at the gate, mounting to the door, and then pausing again. A key was turned in the lock, the footsteps entered the hall, stood still for a moment, went up two or three stairs, came down again, and into the parlour.

Nell hesitated, her eyes opened wide at sight of this unlooked-for guest, the red in her cheeks deepened, she hardly found a word of conventional greeting.

She was a charming picture as she stood there; her hair blown about beneath her wide hat, her cheeks glowing with the kisses of the wind, the snowflakes whitening her long dark cloak. She had drawn the glove from one hand, which plucked at the fur of her muff. She was a picture to quicken the pulse of any man; how then did she stir the heart of the man who loved her!

Lyne had risen as she entered the room; he half went to meet her, then he stopped, for, like her, his tongue would not be loosed. This was the very moment he had longed for; yet, now that it had come to him, he could not use it.

But one of them must say something, and Lyne hoped that Miss Haffenden had not got wet in the snowstorm. No; Miss Haffenden had been completely protected by her ulster. It was an unusually severe snowstorm, was it not? It was, and he feared that it would increase. She was afraid that if the winter continued as it had begun, it would be very trying for the poor people in his parish. It would indeed; he did not know what would become of many of them. A pause.

They were at opposite sides of the fire, Nell leaning back in her chair, with her slender feet upon the fender. She had loosened her cloak, it had fallen from her shoulders, and the firelight played over her rounded figure and among the dark threads of her hair, and brightened the tints in her cheek.

A lock of hair had escaped from beneath her hat, and strayed over her cheek. He fell to counting the separate threads, until she, wondering at his silence, lifted her glance, and their eyes met, and he was conscious of a half-suppressed twinkle in hers.

"I came—to talk to you—about—myself."

Nell did not answer; she did not even look up.

"About myself—and—about you."

Still no answer. But this time there was a rather nervous movement about the corners of her mouth.

"Until two days ago," he went on, "I was almost content to love you silently, because I had then no right to do anything else. Since then——" and he told her of what had happened, and how it had emboldened him to put his love into words, and to ask her to be his wife.

"Will you?" he said.

"Yes," she said, "I will."

"Lift your head and say it again, Nell. Let me look into your eyes while you say it—such beautiful eyes, Nell! Now, say it again."

"I will say it twenty times, if you would like to hear it, Frank."

And then, at last, he held her in his arms, and they lost themselves and all the world in one perfect kiss.

"You know," he said presently, "that we shall be poor, very poor, for a long while."

"Ah! that will be a great hardship to me, who have been poor all my life, will it not?"

"My beautiful Nell, I think it would be almost wicked in me to carry you away to the gray skies and the bare ugly streets of the east."

"Frank," she said, and her voice sank to a soft murmur, "there will be no gray skies and no ugly streets for me where you are."

"Love! my love — my Nell! You are content, then?"

"Yes, Frank, and more than that. I am happier than I have been in all my life before."

Outside, the snow drove heavily against the window, the wind whistled in the chimney, and—

"Nell," said Frank, "let us talk about our plans."

"Oh! Frank, what plans? It's too soon; we won't have any plans for a long time yet. And, Frank, don't let us tell any one; let us keep it a secret for awhile."

"But, Nell," said Frank, looking very shamefaced indeed, "I—I h—have——"

"You *have*! Do you mean that you actually told somebody before ever I promised you?"

"Oh, no, Nell; not that I only said that I wanted to. Old Mr. Gripp, you know—he was so very sympathetic when I came in; and if you'd felt as frightened as I did, Nell, you'd have wanted to tell somebody."

"But he will have told Miss Gripp all about it by this time. Oh, Frank; you shouldn't!"

The truth was that Teresa and Joe were shivering excitedly on the landing.

"Don't you think I might knock at the door now, dear?" Joe had asked a dozen times already; and Teresa's invariable reply had been, "Joseph, if you say that again I will remain in bed for a week. You have no more decency than a child."

In spite of Nell's professed unwillingness to make any plans for a long while, they did make a great many in a very short while, and would have made more but for some

interruptions, for which Frank was to blame, and which occurred at pretty frequent intervals.

It was after one of these, a little louder than usual, that the portrait of old Mr. Gripp became suddenly and violently agitated. It might have been the wind.

Frank started, and looked up at the picture.

"It was the grandpapa of Miss Gripp," she said.

"He appears to be a very nice old gentleman."

"He has been dead thirty years."

"Then he ought not to interrupt us."

At this moment a very noisy bell rang outside. It expressed the compromise at which Teresa had arrived with Joe; she had permitted him to ring the supper bell. It was the bell which had done duty in the boarding-house, and being far too large for the smaller establishment, it could never be rung without giving persons in its immediate neighbourhood an impression that the alarm was being sounded for a disaster of some sort. When Joe rang it more lustily than usual, people in the adjoining houses had been known to go into the street and inquire where the fire was.

Joe could not have employed a more effective method of reminding the lovers that there was a boiled fowl for supper.

"If you *do* stay for supper, Frank," said Nell, in a tone which meant that she knew he had a long way to go, but that she had a great desire to show him off to the family, "you must be very nice to Miss Gripp, who is very delicate, and—oh!—here is Miss Gripp."

"I fear," observed Teresa, "that my health will suffer from this, but I trust I know my duty better than to neglect what is proper on such an occasion." This had a wintry sound, but the thawing process was never a rapid one with Teresa.

"It reminds me," began Joe, "I say it reminds me of the night when Senator Johnson——"

"Joseph," interrupted his sister, "your reminiscences are seldom nice. Mr. Lyne, I hope that you will favour us with your company at supper. I do not take supper myself, but——"

"Mr. Lyne has a long way to go," put in Nell, in half-unwilling accents. She wanted him to stay, but for the first time in her life she was a little ashamed of her friends.

"Ha! In future the way *there* will be no longer than the way *here*. Eh? Shall it be put so?" said Joe, radiant.

"Joseph!" said his sister.

"Hum! Humorous, but trivial. It slipped out, Teresa."

"I do not like to refuse your hospitality," said Frank pleasantly, "but——"

"The bird is on the table, and—h'm—jointed," observed Joe. "I say, the bird is not only there, but jointed."

"Well, then, as you are so kind, let us go in," said Frank.

It was an odd supper-party. Teresa, in a faded flamingo-coloured wrapper, about which there was a legend that it had once gone near to inspire love in the bosom of an elderly boarder. Joe, wavering between the fear of his sister's tongue and a strong desire to say a great many good-natured but probably embarrassing things to the lovers. Nell and Frank, oblivious of their surroundings, and company, and everything else, save of the love which they had just begun to drink in fullest measure.

"I think, Mr. Lyne," remarked Miss Gripp toward the end of the meal, "it will be a satisfaction to you to know, at this early stage, that I have not the vestige of an objection to offer to any arrangement which you and Miss Haffenden may have thought proper to enter upon."

"It is exceedingly kind of you to say so," answered Frank. "Miss Haffenden has permitted an—arrangement which makes me the happiest man living." Joe chuckled. This was the kind of thing he enjoyed.

"I am sure I am delighted to hear it," went on Teresa. "In a state of health which is not always compatible with the full discharge of my domestic and other duties, I have found Miss Haffenden the kindest and most patient friend and helper. Miss Haffenden, my dear, I am overjoyed. Joseph, I should have thought you might discover something to say on an occasion like the present."

Joe, nervous and full of blushes, replied that Miss Haffenden was well aware what his sentiments were on all matters in which she was concerned. "But when I think," he added solemnly, "that Miss Haffenden may shortly be called upon to leave us, I am plunged in a condition of the beastliest dejection."

To this Nell (though not without an inarticulate expression of dissent from Frank) replied that there would be no immediate occasion for Mr. Gripp to let his grief overwhelm him.

Soon afterwards, Teresa let fall a general hint that cold fowl and sherry were not to be trifled with at such a late hour of the evening, and supper was brought to an end.

Nell and Frank said good night at the door.

"You don't mind them *very* much, do you, dear?" she whispered, looking up at him, with one hand resting on his shoulder, and the other fast held in his. "They have been ever so kind to me, and they really are very good and intelligent people. What do you think of them, Frank?"

"I like them very much indeed," replied Frank promptly. "I think they are charming; and if they were anything else, it would be enough for me to know that they had been kind to you."

"When are you coming to see me again, Frank?"

"If you look at me like that when you ask it, I shall come to-morrow and the next day and every day; and then what will happen to my work?"

"Oh, no, you shall not neglect your work; but you will steal a little while now and then, won't you, Frank? Let me see; this is Friday, the day after to-morrow will be Sunday. I shall see you then, and you can preach all your sermon at me. Oh, Frank," she said, with a sudden unrestrained impulse, "is it not a delicious thing to be in love?"

CHAPTER XXXII.

MABEL.

LITTLE Mabel Fawcett in her turn was going through a course of quite novel experiences. She had fallen in love only to be informed that she had made a dire mistake, and must get out of that state again as quickly as possible. She did not do so, because she refused to believe in the truth of what Nell had told her. In a very harmless way Mabel had been a spoiled child all her life. Her guardian, though he never saw her, and rarely communicated with her, had never, in so far as he knew her requirements, allowed her to want for anything. She had generally found that the things she desired to have came to her sooner or later; and she could not understand at all why she should be crossed in this, the dearest wish her heart had ever shaped.

Mabel was really very much in love with Horace, more so than she herself had believed, until Nell told her of this difficulty which Horace himself had set up between them. But her love could not altogether change her child's nature. She was the simplest creature in the world, with her one gift of exquisite song. She had arranged matters so nicely in her own fancy that it seemed cruel to have all her little plans blown down in this way.

She and Horace were to be very much in love with each other; she was to be completely in love with him, and he was to be very nearly, if not quite, as much in love with her. Nell and the clergyman she had allotted to each other long ago; and they were all to be married when the warm weather came, and go on living close to each other for the remainder of their lives.

These arrangements had shaped themselves in her fancy in a very short time; they were the schemes of a child, whose own love-course and that of her friends were to run quite smoothly for ever and ever; just as if Shakespeare and the general course of human kind had not declared this to be impossible. But all the while that she had been weaving out of "airy nothing" the future happiness of herself and Nell, Mabel had been unconsciously falling deeper and deeper in love.

Her passion for Horace had fed itself from small sources. A tender look from those kindly eyes, a few words a little kinder than ordinary, a rare pressure of the hand—these, at the few chance meetings that had happened to them, had been sufficient to kindle the flame. The breath of her own fancy had fanned it—the fancy of a little winsome girl, who was simple almost to childishness.

Her small head was quite filled by the difficulty that had opposed itself in the way of her first love. It may be admitted at once that there was something peculiar in her position. She was quite isolated, and more than that, she had been isolated all her life. Her guardian was the only one with whom she could claim kinship—nay, she did not know that she could claim kinship even with him; there might be no tie of blood between them. The earliest and the only home she remembered was a convent: relatives, friends, acquaintance—all these had been represented to her by the sisters only. She had a name, to be sure, but she did not know that it was really her own, and believed she had been told that her guardian had put his own name upon her at the time that he adopted her.

What must she do to set this dreadful matter right? She knew that the simplest and most sensible course would be to write at once to her guardian; but not even in this dilemma could she face such a task as that. Her guardian had never been her friend, there had never been the ghost of a confidence between them; she knew him only as the person who arranged the details of her existence and paid the bills. Writing to her guardian, therefore, was, so far as Mabel herself was concerned, quite out of the question.

Then she must turn to the sisters. But she was not much more willing to do this. The sisters were absorbed by their own devotional and philanthropic works. They

attended to the church, visited the poor, sewed for the poor, prayed for the poor, and ministered to them with all their energies. Mabel never liked to intrude her own concerns upon them, though she was a pet with everybody. She stood rather in awe of the sisters, and in particular of the Superior. It was therefore with considerable trepidation that, finding herself accidentally alone with that lady, she one day broached the matter in this way.

"I should like, if you please, to know who I am."

"Who you are, Mabel? That is rather a strange question, is it not?"

"I mean, please, whether I am the person that—that I am supposed to be?"

"Why yes, my dear, I hope so. Who else should you be?"

"I don't know. But sometimes mistakes are made, aren't they? I mean that people are not always the people that people suppose they are; they are some other people."

"My dear, I really do not know what you are talking about. Who has been putting these fancies into your head? Are you not well?"

"Oh yes, thank you—at least not quite. That is—are you sure, then, that I am myself?"

"Well, dear, I am inclined to doubt whether you are at this moment. I do not think you are very well. We shall have to doctor you. Come and see me this evening after prayers. Would you like me to write to Mr. Fawcett?"

"Oh my! no, if you please. It does not matter in the least. I only thought I should like to know exactly who I am. Thank you. I should not like any medicine."

The only real confidante she had was Nell. It was on Nell that she relied to play the part of the good fairy, and bring her safely out of her troubles. Had not Nell promised, or almost promised this, and who but Nell should do it? But as Mabel would not write to her guardian, Nell was as powerless as she was to solve that tiresome problem of Horace's. They talked, and talked, and talked about it, but to no very definite purpose; always leaving off exactly where they had begun. The only thing they both felt sure of was, that it was all a mistake, and that sooner or later it would right itself.

But in the meanwhile, being now entirely cut off from

any chance of meeting Horace—for she would not go anywhere that he was likely to be—Mabel grew quite a forlorn and sad little person.

She that had given most of its gaiety to the staid and quiet convent, became as demure as any of its inmates. A fantastic melancholy surrounded the little lady, as if a fairy were in the blues. She might be seen pacing the long, deep walks of the garden, a wintry little figure, muffled close in furs, with the trees like great grave sentinels around her. Sometimes, when she walked there after dusk, a voice would call from a window: "Little Mabel, come in; you will catch cold, and spoil your beautiful voice." And Mabel always went, for she was obedient to every one.

By way of providing some diversion for her feelings, and of putting herself at the same time into a sort of mental communication with Horace, she began to be a diligent student of art. She made Nell take her to the winter exhibitions. She bought art reviews and books on art, and learned the names of the principal artists, and made her head ache in trying to learn the theories of the newest schools. She pulled down all the old engravings in her room, and bought a fresh set, because, as she told Nell, the old ones had no "feeling."

One day an awkward thing happened. She and Horace met after service on a Sunday morning just outside the church door. Horace was there with Nell, though in the circumstances I think he ought to have gone somewhere else. The meeting was all the more stupid because, in the first place, whatever understanding had been arrived at between Horace and Mabel, it was so far only a tacit one; and in the next place, Mabel was not supposed to have any knowledge of the doubt that had arisen in Horace's mind. But this last circumstance, at any rate, was not to be blinked, for it could not be hidden that this meeting was on a different footing from any other that had taken place between them.

So it was that Horace, seeing the little thing look pale, and noting the air of constraint with which she spoke to him, said in a whisper, as they were parting:

"I'm awfully sorry, Mabel—will you let me call you Mabel?"

Yes, she would let him do that; her eyes and cheeks said as much before her lips moved.

"And will you call me Horace?"

Yes—though a little hesitatingly—she thought she would perhaps do that also.

"Are *you* sorry, Mabel?"

"Oh, yes. At least, perhaps so. It's rather stupid, don't you think?"

And Horace was constrained to admit that it was.

Two results followed from this meeting. The first was, that Mabel was made rather happier in her mind; the second was, that the whole matter was brought to the knowledge of the convent.

Mabel's handsome acquaintance had been noticed more than once at the church, and after this last meeting, which had been rather longer than usual, one of the sisters thought it incumbent upon her to inform the Superior. Mabel was regarded as the child of the whole convent, and, in a peculiar sense, in its keeping, since she was not one of themselves; so that each sister felt a certain responsibility on her account.

The matter was privately talked over with Nell, who, by this time, had several friends in the convent. The Superior was rather grave at first, but Nell showed her that there had not been the smallest cause for displeasure; that there was nothing clandestine between the two young persons, and as yet no love-making.

Then, thinking to enlist the sympathies of the Superior on Mabel's side, Nell made a full and complete confession. She judged rightly. The sister was still full of gravity and a sense of responsibility, but there were smiles beneath; and she was evidently both amused and interested.

She could not, however, permit anything of this kind without the consent of the only person who, so far as she knew, had a right to control Miss Fawcett's affairs; and she was of opinion that that person, her guardian, should be communicated with at once. As to the question raised, she was quite unable to answer it, for though she had no reason to doubt that Miss Fawcett's name was her own, she had no certain knowledge on the subject, and knew no more of the young girl's history than had been given in the letter of the Superior of the French con-

vent from which she came. But this, again, appeared to be another and a stronger reason for bringing the whole matter before the notice of Miss Fawcett's guardian.

It resulted, not unnaturally, from this interview, that the perplexing affair of the little Mabel became in a very short time the property of the entire convent. And, contrary to what might have been expected, the sisters one and all, were vastly interested. Mabel began to occupy a new position in their eyes; the subject was talked about every day, and they were all quite eager that it should be cleared up, and Mabel and Horace should become real lovers as quickly as possible.

"But I don't see how that's to be, Nell," said Mabel.

"There's only one way," replied Nell: "you must write to your guardian."

"I daren't do that, Nell."

"Very well, then; it will never be cleared up. You will have to go on like this for ever and ever and ev——"

"Suppose you write the letter, Nell."

"I'll dictate, and you shall write. Now sit down, and we'll begin at once."

And they began.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"BUT LOVE GROWS BITTER WITH TREASON."

ON the following evening Nell had another visitor.

She was alone in the little sitting-room between eight and nine in the evening; tired with a busy day at the studio, and a brisk walk afterwards through the snowy avenues of the Park; and now she had drawn a low chair before the fire with the intention of indulging in the luxury of a book until bed-time.

She had read a chapter of Jeremiah to Teresa, and had dosed and tucked her in for the night. She had given Joe her company for half an hour downstairs, while he smoked his pipe, and pronounced his nightly eulogium on herself, her dress, her talents, and all her virtues. The remainder of the evening she thought that she might fairly claim as her own.

The deep snow, filling all the streets, deadened the noises of the night, and the room was very still as Nell sat and watched the fire with the book unopened before her. There was no book she could read that evening but the book of her own delicious thoughts. She was sitting in the chair that Frank had sat in when he asked her to be his wife, and her busy brain lived again through the bliss of that ineffable hour. It seemed to her that her whole being had developed within the last two days; her feelings were fuller and richer; her consciousness heightened; she had entered on a phase of life of which she had until now had no conception.

All her ideas of the future were changed. What did success in art matter now? What was ambition—that poor

thin sustenance of loveless lives—to one whose existence the riches of love had filled to overflowing? For the moment the past was forgotten, and the future unheeded; she lived only in the golden haze of the present. She looked the picture of happiness that evening, reclining before the fire, one elbow on the arm of her chair, supporting her cheek, a half-smile on her lips, and a soft light in her eyes.

A knock at the outer door startled her from her dream, and she waited with some curiosity while Joe came with short, stiff steps from below, and along the passage. Was it Frank? No, it could not be he so soon again; and if it were not Frank, it might be any one; she did not care.

A minute later the sitting-room door opened and Martin Clymo entered. He was not looking well. His face was paler than usual, and there was a heaviness about the eyes and corners of the mouth.

"You would be better back again in the old home," thought Nell, at the first glance.

His coming surprised her not a little. She had not heard of him for long, nor seen him since the night that he dogged her footsteps in the street. By a sort of tacit consent on either side they had ceased to communicate with each other. Martin had never yet made fair amends for the insolence he had shown her when he first came to town.

She thought he had gone home again; nay, she had hardly thought of him at all. Her life was so busy and so happy, and Martin, who had once been a sharer in it, in those old days that were now so far behind, had completely separated himself from her.

Yet, if she had grown almost into forgetfulness of him, he had been far from forgetting her; though there was little of tenderness in his thoughts now. The feeling that he had lost her was such a bitter one; it maddened him so that he had doggedly refused to give it place.

All this while that he had kept away from her he had never lost sight of her. He knew her ways and her habits; he knew what time she went out in the morning, and when she might be expected to return in the evening. For months past he had had her under his watch, as closely and completely as though he had been a hired spy with orders

never to let her from his eyes. The night that we saw him following her and her companions through the streets was not the only time he had been employed in that fashion. Many such walks had he taken by day and night, clinging close to her steps, though she knew nothing of his nearness. Under cover of darkness in the short winter evenings he had often followed her almost to her own door; he had paced the street when he knew that she was in the house, watching the light in her window, and feeling a jealous pang when any visitor was admitted. He knew all her visitors by this time; and two of them he hated. He did not know which to regard as his worst enemy—the slim, fair-haired artist, who was there often, or the handsome young parson, who went less frequently, but was always admitted readily and stayed long.

Twenty times a day did he curse his own folly in having quarrelled with her; and yet, every time he did so, his conscience told him that one word of honest repentance would bring her friendship back again. But this he would not speak, for he knew that though it would bring friendship it would bring nothing else, and friendship did not suffice for him now.

What devil prompted her to leave the old home and come to this damned London, where a plain, honest farmer had no chance against bright-haired artists and good-looking parsons? But was there no blame on himself? Had he ever made enough of her in those days when he felt so sure that she was his? Yet, what did all that matter now? Here she was, a thousand times handsomer and cleverer than ever, with her fine friends about her, and he left out in the cold. He must see her again, though, if it were only to quarrel afresh.

"Why, Martin!" exclaimed Nell, as she rose to greet him, "I did not look for *you*. I thought you had gone home."

She gave him her hand, but there was little warmth in his returning pressure.

"No, Nell," he answered, coming forward slowly toward the fire. "I haven't gone back yet. Did you think I should go without saying good-bye?"

He spoke with little cordiality, but quietly, and with an

evident effort at self-restraint; and there was a trifle more polish about his manner than was customary with him.

"Did you think that I should go without saying good-bye?" he repeated, for Nell had not answered this query. She did not like to say that she had scarcely thought about it at all; and was too straightforward to make a false excuse, so she said:

"I did not think you could leave the farm so long."

"I've left it in good hands, and I—I've had business here," replied Martin. "But," he added, "I'm going back shortly, I expect; and I wanted to ask if——"

He hesitated a moment, and Nell, who may have anticipated some unwelcome question, made haste to finish for him.

"If I have any message to send home? That was kind of you, Martin. Yes; I have something for Mr. Meadow-sweet; a book, and a message as well. Rather a long message, Martin; so perhaps I had better write it."

"That wasn't what I was going to ask," said Martin, "though I'll take your message, Nell. But what is it that wants a letter? Is it something you're afraid to trust me with?" he added, with a jealous touch.

Nell, in her turn, hesitated a moment. Her eyes left Martin's, and turned to the fire; her fingers moved nervously in her lap, and her colour deepened a degree. She was wondering what Martin would say to that message she wanted to send her friend; and yet why should she hesitate? Had she any need to be afraid of Martin? Martin could not control her now.

"I want to tell him," she said quietly, "because he is my oldest, and, I think, my truest friend, that I am engaged to be married. That, in brief, is the message, Martin."

She did not look up, for though she knew herself to be her own mistress, and that Martin now, least almost of any one in the world, had the right to a voice in her actions, she shrank from giving him the pain which she felt that her words would cause. It was the weakness of a generous nature.

For a few moments Martin stood still and silent, and a dead-white look came into his face. This was more than he had expected, and it stunned him.

"Who are you going—who is going to marry you?" he said at length, more in a whisper than aloud.

"Mr. Lyne, a clergyman."

"I know him. The fine young parson that's hail-fellow-well-met with the thieves in the east. A good match on both sides."

This last was an attempt at sarcasm, which did not seem to Nell to call for an answer. Martin's efforts in that direction were seldom happy.

"Is this your message then, Nell?" he said again, with a desperate effort at a softened tone. "Don't do this, Nell; don't marry him. You don't know how I've waited and waited, and hoped for you. I've never left thinking of you yet, Nell. I've——"

"Stay, Martin, please; this is not fair; and I think it is hardly correct. You forget the answer that I gave you long ago. And how have you treated me since then? You left me alone entirely. You neither came to me, nor sent to me, nor wrote to me. If you had done all this it could make no difference, so far as anything but friendship is concerned. Surely I made that plain enough long ago. But you did nothing; and yet you tell me that all this while you have been waiting and hoping. Waiting for what? Hoping for what? Martin, is this quite honest?"

This was to the point, and Martin did not like it. A sudden flush covered his features, and he said with violence:

"You shall not marry this parson—I'll not have it!"

"Those are loud words; but you forget that you have no right of interference," she answered coldly.

"You were promised to me first," said Clymo sullenly, putting a strong curb upon his violence.

"It never was a real promise, and you know it, Martin. And if it had been, it would not be right in me to marry you now."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not—because I love Frank Lyne."

Martin ground his teeth and was silent. Presently he said:

"And what does this high-class parson, for I'm told he's of a good family, think of his village sweetheart?"

"You need not try to throw that in my teeth. He knows as much of me as I know of myself, and is content."

"Ah, so! That's well. As much as you know of yourself?"

Martin was thinking of one of his recent interviews with his friend of the theatres. Then he said sententiously:

"Well, this is brave news, Nell, and will make quite a noise down in the old place. But I'll not wish you joy just yet. There's many a slip 'twixt cup and lip, you know; though I hope you'll not prove it."

"You have taken to speaking in enigmas, Martin; I do not understand you," said Nell. "But it is very kind of you to warn me. I will try and remember your warning."

"Well, don't let it weigh too heavy on you, Nell. But maybe it will come into your mind of itself one day. Good-bye, Nell."

"Good-bye, Martin; and, once more, thank you. Never mind about the message. I will write it myself."

So they parted, and Nell was alone once more.

"Martin has certainly become very enigmatic," she said to herself. "What did he mean? Was that another threat? How foolish he is! And he is very unkind too. To think that Martin, of all people in the world, should be the one to make the shadow on my path. He is jealous and very angry. He has no right to be either. What does my high-class parson think of his village sweetheart? I think he is not ashamed of her, at any rate. And I hope he has no cause to be. Can Martin do me any harm? I think not. Would he harm me if he could? I do not know. He is very jealous."

True. He was indeed. The snake jealousy had set her fangs in him with a vengeance now, and the poison had begun to work. He set off to walk home with a hot head and angry heart; he walked till he was tired, then called a cab and drove a little distance; but, growing restless, got out and walked again.

He reached his lodgings and let himself in. The fire was out, but in the mood he was in it did him good to go down on his knees and make and light a fresh one. Then he sat himself before it, but presently got up again and paced the room. By-and-by he broke out into speech.

"What a fool am I that can't keep my tongue between my lips, but must froth and rave like an idiot whenever I'm angered at her. She shows the best of the two when we're together; I'll say that. She'll none of me now; but I think that I can—eh?"

He broke off short, for the thought that came into his mind was a cruel one, and he did not like to speak it.

He drew his chair to the fire again and sat down. A look of cunning began to steal over his face, and the whole man seemed to undergo a slow but thorough transformation. He was setting himself deliberately to plot against the happiness of the woman he loved.

His brain was slow to work, and he had no definite scheme before him; but he had long been cogitating this matter, and it had at length begun to take shape in his mind.

He had got all he could out of Garrick, and had followed up as closely as he had been able the inquiries which the old man's story had suggested to him. Little by little he had learned some curious things.

He had now no doubt that Nell was directly concerned in the sudden disappearance from her native village two-and-twenty years before, of the woman whose name she bore, and who had always passed as her aunt. This village woman, he was persuaded, was the same that had figured in Garrick's story; Nell was the child who had suddenly appeared in her cottage, and whose coming had been followed by immediate trouble and disgrace.

Everything tallied with these conjectures.

There was the name, which was not a common one; there was the arrival of these two, the woman and her "niece," at the little village in the north within a few days after the disappearance of Sarah Haffenden from her home in the south.

Putting together the facts he had learned and the conjectures he had made, Martin had arrived at a singular and horrible conclusion. But it was also a plausible one, and the more he examined and tested and weighed it, the more certain was he of its truth.

He had bent all his efforts to perfect this conclusion, for it was to be his lever in the cruel scheme he had in mind.

He sat long into the night shaping his plans; and before he went to bed he had worked out some rough course of action.

The smouldering fire in the grate typified the slow dying of the honest man within him, and out of the ashes rose another Martin who had been marked out to do the work of jealousy.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CHRISTMAS.

"AND you didn't come and tell *me* the very minute it happened?"

"Why, mouse, how could I? Haven't I just said that he didn't leave the house till past ten o'clock?"

"Oh, well, that excuses you for the first night. But to let a *week* go, and never say a word—oh, Nell!"

"Well, but, you know we meant to keep it a secret for a long while; we did indeed, for ever such a while. But I couldn't keep it from you any longer; and you are the very first that I have told it to. There, let that content you."

"Oh, Nell, I'm so delighted! I knew it was coming to this. I knew it weeks and weeks ago. I knew it the first time I saw you together. And to think that it has really happened just as I arranged that it should! At least, not just"—and a small tear glistened in her eye. "I meant that you should be asked on one day, and I on the day after, and that we should wish each other joy on one and the same day. That was how I had planned it, Nell;" and the little Mabel put her hands on her friend's shoulder, and looked up at her with a pretty childish smile, and the small tear still glistened in her eye.

"I wish it had been like that, dear," said Nell fondly, taking the girl's cheeks between her hands, and pressing them softly. "But, puss, I'll tell you this; you will be happily settled before I am. There, what do you think of that?"

"I think it's good kind rubbish—that's what I think."

"Well, wait and see."

"Why, now you're growing superstitious, old solemnity. But I won't let you. Come, never mind me just now, I want to hear all about how it went with you. Tell me just how he looked and what he said, and how he said it, and how close he sat beside you while he was saying it."

"Dear heart, I couldn't! I don't know. He sat something like you are sitting now. No, not so close. At least—not at first. And he looked—oh, gracious! I don't know how he looked; do you suppose I looked at him? I was shaking just like that little flame there. And he said he was afraid to ask it; and he *was* rather afraid, but not half so much as I was. And then, by-and-by the supper bell rang, and, oh yes! we had a boiled fowl for supper."

"Oh, the dreadful creature! That is all she remembers. We had a boiled fowl for supper! Why, I should have remembered to my dying day every look that crossed his face, and every shade in his voice, and every syllable he said!"

"Why, and so shall I, sweetheart; but do you think I could put all that into words?"

It was Christmas Eve, and growing late. They were sitting in Mabel's room in the convent. There had been a service in the church, and the sisters who had been present were just returning. Presently the stillness of the house was broken by the soft ripple of music. It was the sisters singing in unison an old church carol. The strain rose and echoed through the noiseless corridors, and it fell on the ears of the two listeners like a chorus of angels. It died away as softly as it had begun, and left the convent as still as before.

"It is an omen of good!" whispered Mabel, with her head nestling on Nell's shoulder.

"Let us hope so," answered Nell. "And now good night, love, and a merry Christmas."

"It will be all the merrier for what you have told me, Nell," answered the other. And they kissed, and said good night and a merry Christmas; and Nell trudged home three-quarters of a mile through the snow, and dreamed dreams of paradise.

The Christmas that was just dawning Nell remembered long as one of the happiest periods of her life. She and

Frank spent a good deal of it together, as much in fact as, with propriety, they could. Nell's position was such that she was obliged to a great extent to be her own duenna; or at least to put herself in the place of an imaginary duenna, and to say in what circumstances she might and might not enjoy the solitary society of her lover.

They were both a trifle innocent on the subject, and Nell on one occasion found herself seeking counsel of Teresa, as to what a young lady ought to do who was engaged and had no mother to direct her steps. Her choice of a monitress was perhaps not in all respects an ideal one, Teresa being a spinster rather of the cut-and-dried variety; but, on the whole, she might have gone further for advice and fared worse. For though Teresa held strictly orthodox views about the time, length, and general circumstances of the lover's visits to his lady, and laid it down as a rule admitting of no exception that she herself ought always to be present on those occasions, she added in a casual way, "You know, dear, something would be certain to require my attention downstairs before very long."

It was of course impossible for a lady who was the victim of so many maladies as Miss Gripp to play propriety for any one outside her own house. "But there," she said in a burst of confidence, "you are to be trusted implicitly; and are you not engaged to a clergyman of the Established Church? Where does he want you to go with him?"

"Oh, to thieves' suppers, and workhouses, and casual wards, and places like those," said Nell innocently.

"Ahem!" replied Miss Gripp a little severely. "I think, dear, you had better have applied to a chemist than to me."

However, in spite of this rather deprecatory opinion of Teresa's Nell did contrive to see something of the way in which Christmas was kept in outcast London, in and around the circle of Frank's daily labour. It was an odd fashion of holiday-making, but it enabled her to enjoy her lover's society, and to view some singular specimens of humanity.

"I don't believe much in this haphazard sort of charity; filling a man's stomach one day in the week, and letting him go hungry the rest, with a greater inducement than ever to steal his neighbour's loaf," said Frank, in allusion to one of the Christmas feasts, which he himself had had the chief

hand in furnishing; "but after all, Christmas is Christmas, and it *is* a blessed thing to see them eat well once in a way."

They turned as he spoke into a long, low room, dimly lighted by gas, although it was yet early in the afternoon; where forty or fifty men were herded together at a couple of deal tables, waiting like beasts in a menagerie to receive their Christmas dinner. It was the queerest Christmas party that Nell had ever seen. She thought of that marriage-feast in the Gospel, for which the guests had been furnished from the highways and the hedges, and wondered whether it had worn such an aspect as this.

The men sat as still as ghosts; no one said, "A merry Christmas" to his neighbour; it would have been a kind of profanity. Gaunt and stricken creatures they were, most of them; old and young; there was not a light look or a jest amongst them. And notwithstanding the desperate hunger that was written on nearly every face, there was very little eagerness when the food was set before them. Some indeed fell to on the instant with a famished growl, and ate and drank and drank and ate, as though this were to be the last meal they would ever taste; but the greater number ate like men in a dream, as though they had their doubts about the whole affair, and would not have been surprised had the dishes been whisked away at any moment, and they had found themselves shivering in some familiar arch or doorway, with an eye to a casual crust in the gutter, and an ear for the policeman's footfall. Nell felt almost ashamed to be standing up in such a company, with warm clothes to her back and stout boots to her feet; and she blushed involuntarily when a poor fellow at the end of the table where she had placed herself put out his hand, and in a mechanical way stroked the surface of her thick cloth coat. She slipped half-a-crown into his hand, though what he had done was evidently not meant as an appeal. One other incident of the feast made an impression on her. It was when a thin gray man, of forty or thereabouts, went up to Lyne just as the dishes were being cleared away, and asked in an abashed whisper whether he might put the remnants of his dinner into his pocket for his wife, whom he had left on a sick-bed at home. It was Lyne's function to do something in the way of an address when the board was cleared; but he did

it with less than his usual freedom, and the words seem to stick in his throat.

There was a service in Lyne's church in the evening, and it was late, and dark, and bitter cold, when he started to take Nell home. He was going to put up with Horace that night, so they journeyed westward together. Nell insisted on walking until they reached the boundaries of civilisation, for she wanted to see what the streets of the East looked like on a winter's night. It was a desolate and rather a sad spectacle, and Nell had soon seen enough to convince her that a "good old-fashioned winter," with snow on the ground, and the thermometer below freezing, means one thing to people in the West, who have a thick cheque-book in their desk, and another and a vastly different thing to some thousands of people in the East, who have not a shilling in the savings-bank to buy a handful of coal.

On the way they met a policeman on his beat who was known to Lyne, and who, at his request, led them down one or two back streets, where almost the only ray of light came from the snow in the roadway and on the pavement. Their guide stopped at a low house, with an unpainted door, and the shutters barred across the windows. He knocked, and held a momentary colloquy with a thickset, unshaven man in his shirt-sleeves, who answered the summons. Then the man turned about and went along a passage, and the policeman went after him, and Lyne and Nell followed.

Suddenly the man threw open a door, and the two visitors looked into a room ablaze with light, and heated by a roaring fire which burned on an open hearth. The room was crowded with men and boys of all ages, who kept up a perpetual din, the like of which is not to be matched anywhere out of a thieves' kitchen. For this was what it was: here were the thieves at home, enjoying Christmas thoroughly; some in the act of cooking supper, and others eating it, with the satisfied consciousness of having earned it by hard and skilled labour. Their uproarious merriment contrasted strangely with the ghastly silence of the outcasts they had seen earlier in the day; but those were the honest, weak wretches who had failed without stooping to crime; these were thriving criminals.

They recognised the constable and gave him a cheer; and chaffed Nell and the parson in a lingo which was Dutch to the former.

Presently they found themselves in the street again, and every now and then they encountered a scarcely animated bundle of rags huddled in a corner of a doorway, or crouched in the angle of a wall—the fashion in which the occupants of the rags had found it necessary to pass a night in the cheerful week of a good old-fashioned Christmas.

Their guide left them, and went back on his beat, for they were entering one of the broad thoroughfares that lead into the City.

Just then they had to step from the pavement into the road to avoid a small crowd, in the midst of which were two policemen carrying a stretcher on which the vague outline of a body covered with a cloth was discernible.

"What is it?" asked Lyne, and some one in the crowd vouchsafed the brief reply: "Found dead!" The crowd stopped at a door, and the policemen went in with their burden.

Nell pressed closer to her lover and sighed.

"What is it, dearest?" he asked.

"I begin to be sorry that we came, Frank. It seems wrong that we two should be so happy in these cruel streets."

"Do not say that, love. You must not grow faint-hearted. When you are my wife—at least, so long as my work lies here—it may be that you will have to see much of this. Are you afraid, Nell?"

"No, for I shall have you always by my side. But, oh, Frank, I am glad now for the first time when I think that you may some day be rich. Frank, you must use your money well. You must use most of it for the poor."

"You shall spend it, Nell. I wonder what you would spend it on?"

"Oh, we can easily spend it. We will have soup-kitchens in every street; and I will have an enormous studio, a quarter of a mile square, and make statues to beautify the East End."

Frank laughed. "The statues are the best part of

that scheme, dear," he said. "But set your face against the soup-kitchens. It isn't charity these people want, but work."

They took the train on the Metropolitan, and got out at South Kensington. Lyne went home with her, and said good night at the door.

"How long have you loved me, Frank?" she whispered; and Frank began at once to answer, but she laid her hand upon his lips.

"You are not to say," said she, "that you adored me from the moment you first set eyes on me. That is what they all say, and it isn't true; it can't be. Nobody really loves anybody at first sight."

"Perhaps not, wiseacre. But there is such a thing as an instinct of love at first sight, and that I had."

"From the very first, Frank?"

"From the very first."

"And when did you begin to love me?"

"I began to *want* to love you very soon. Sooner than I believed that I had any right, you know. I thought that you and Horace were in love; and that was my pain. Oh, Nell, you could never imagine what I felt when Horace told me that you didn't love him!"

"I am very fond of Horace, Frank."

"Why, and so you may be, sweet; for so am I."

"Did Horace—did he tell you that *he* was amongst the silly ones once?"

"Well, he didn't put it in that way. But he said that he had ventured on a certain question, and that you had given him a plain answer; and that when he came to think about it, he found that you had been quite right."

"Yes, Horace made a mistake; though we are all the better friends for it now. But oh, Frank, darling, you do not think that *you* have been mistaken, do you?"

"Love, if my love for you be not truth, then there is no true thing in all the world. Oh, Nell, you cannot doubt me!"

"I do not doubt you, dearest. But, Frank, dear, let us not be too much in love with each other; at least not just yet. Suppose that anything should come between us. How terrible that would be! Such things have happened, Frank."

But Frank, in the great strength of his love, laughed her fears away.

"What should come between us, my Nell? You love me, and I love you, and we are free. Is not that enough? You are nervous because you are tired. I have taken you too far. Go to bed, and sleep."

"Yes, it was silly of me. What could have made me say that? For I am not frightened a bit. No more than you are, Frank. I am to see you to-morrow? You are going to take a little holiday now, like other people."

"It will be the first Christmas holiday I have had for years, Nell."

"Yes; but all the other Christmases you had not me. That makes a difference, you know."

"It makes all the difference in the world. Good-bye, then, my darling, till to-morrow."

At that moment a cloud drifted over the face of the moon, and Frank was able to say good night in the way that he liked best.

All this while (it was but a few days after all) she had had no opportunity of telling Horace. That same evening, however, he found it out for himself.

The next day he was calling at Harte's studio, and went presently into the room where Nell was working alone.

"Tidings, O queen!" said Horace.

"Well?" said Nell, for she guessed what was coming.

"Grievous tidings."

"Go on. I can bear them."

"One Lyne, a clergyman whom you know; he has had an accident."

"Horace!"

"He has fallen——"

"Oh, Horace!" and she began to turn pale.

"In love."

"Tiresome fellow! Is that all?"

"By no means. He intends to get married."

"Well; I trust he may be happy."

"Does he deserve it?"

"Why not?"

"I think he should be hanged rather. Take a promising artist from her work, and cage her in East London! Where,

I would ask with Bledsoe, where will your inspiration be then?"

"Rubbish! How often have I told you that an artist must not be dependent on surroundings! With Frank beside me I should get more inspiration out of a coal-pit than I should from Rome or Florence with—with anybody else. Now, Horace, be nice, and congratulate me, or I shan't speak to you for a month."

"But the beautifying of London, Nell—who is going to undertake that now?"

"Oh, it will come about all in good time. We are going to begin at the east instead of the west."

"If you are really going to do that I congratulate you at once."

"Thank you, Horace; and now say that you think I am a very fortunate girl."

"Hum! as our friend with the stiff leg observes. Are you angling for a compliment?"

"As if you knew me no better than that!"

"Oh! if it's serious, you shall have a serious answer. I think you are a fortunate couple. Bless you both. I claim the place of best man."

"Oh, no! We will all be married together."

"Hush! You must not say that. I am a doomed man. My fate is decreed."

"Nonsense; we have written to the guardian."

"Good heavens!"

The Gripps had invited Frank to supper that evening.

"The time was," said Teresa, "when we should have asked you to dine with us, Mr. Lyne; but I need not say to a gentleman in the clerical profession that the vicissitudes of life are innumerable."

Joe added an apology after his own fashion, and protested that there was nothing in the larder but the remains of the boiled fowl. In reality, however, they turned out a very neat little supper; for Teresa had a nice taste in these matters, and she had a very willing coadjutor in Joe. After supper Teresa said she had some slides to prepare (go to, Teresa! would you prepare medical slides by gaslight?) and Joe thought he would take a turn on the pavement.

When the lovers were alone, Nell said suddenly to Frank:

"What will your sisters say?"

"They will say a great many things, dear—until they have seen you."

"I am afraid of them, Frank," she said, putting her hand in his, and looking up at him with her great soft eyes.

"Then you are a coward. Are my sisters my keepers? What can they do to me or to you?"

"But they will not like me, Frank, because they will think that I am not half good enough for you. And they will be quite right. But it will be very dreadful for me."

"Nell," he said quietly, with quite a grave look, "you shall not talk like this. And you shall not think such things. My sisters are very good but rather silly girls, who think I have not the wit to choose for myself. But they have eyes to see and ears to hear."

"That sounds very nice, Frank, and I hope it may prove true. When are you going to tell them?"

"I wrote to them two nights ago."

"And they have not answered? I'm afraid that means opposition, doesn't it?"

"Something of the sort, I suppose. But, you see, I told them very little. I want to punish them for having no faith in me. To-morrow I shall go and see them. Shall I take you with me?"

"Oh, no! You must go alone first."

"Very well; I shall mystify them finely. After that we'll go together. What fun it will be!"

He lost no time in putting his resolution into effect. He called on his sisters the next day, and told Nell the result of the interview.

"They are wild with curiosity," said he.

"Are they very angry?" asked Nell.

"They are quite confounded; they haven't recovered themselves sufficiently to be angry. Lucy says Jule lay in bed in a kind of stupor all day after getting my letter, and tried to starve herself into a feeling of resignation. They can't make out anything about you, for I have not enlightened them much."

"But you ought to have done, Frank. You should have told them everything."

"Not a bit. They wouldn't have believed me if I had. This is their proper punishment."

"Do they w—want to see me, Frank?"

"They can hardly rest until they have done so. We are going this afternoon—now—immediately."

"Oh, Frank; and without a word of warning. Why, I've hardly time to dress."

"Upstairs, then, at once; I'll give you five minutes."

She did not keep him more than five-and-twenty; and then they went off in a hansom to visit the sisters Lyne.

Those ladies had been, as their brother said, in a state of the utmost bewilderment. Up to within a few months past they were far more anxious to marry Frank than he was to marry; but always on the understanding, on their part, that they were to choose the wife. These good sisters had always tried to treat their brother as a child. His entering the clerical profession was a step that had met with their very tardy approval, and when he had begun to mark out for himself a path which they felt must separate him from them, they looked upon him as little better than a well-meaning young lunatic. Their ambition, then, had been to marry him to some one with money from their own set, who might persuade him to take a view of the clerical life a little more in accord with that of the world in which they moved; and if this could be brought about, they did not doubt that his talents and their influence would soon prevail to procure him an appointment which would combine with his profession to give him the kind of social standing they desired for him.

The fact is, the young ladies did not know that Frank, through his connection with the new social movement, as well as by his own unaided efforts, had already made for himself a reputation wider and more solid than any they could have helped him to.

Their plans for his good had always been frustrated by his own obstinacy. He declined to marry, and he refused to accept a living in a respectable part of town. The two parties—the brother on the one hand, and the sisters on the other—had lived in a state of more or less amicable

disagreement, not seeing a great deal of each other, nor holding more than a limited amount of communication.

But though Frank had refused to wed a wife of their choosing, the girls were fairly satisfied so long as he showed no disposition to seek one for himself. Their nerves had been a little shaken after that conversation reported in a previous chapter, but, as no immediate result ensued, they concluded that Frank had spoken only to tease them. Their dismay may be imagined when, without any further warning, they received a letter to say that he was engaged to be married. Then he had called to explain matters, and set their minds at ease, as he said; but so far from doing either, he had mystified and perturbed them more than ever.

"They will be here directly. I suppose we must receive them," said Julia on the afternoon in question.

"As if we weren't dying to do so!" replied Lucy, the outspoken.

"Are we nearly there, Frank?" said Nell presently, while something like a sigh escaped her lips.

"Very nearly."

"There is not the least chance that the cabman will lose his way, is there?"

"Not the least. And this is the street, and here is the house."

"They live in a much grander place than you do, Frank," she said, with a small feeling of resentment rising in her bosom.

"So much the better for them," replied Frank, as they went up the steps. "Jule, dear, and Loo," he said, as they were shown into the dim diminutive drawing-room, "I have brought Miss Haffenden to see you. Nell, these are my sisters."

Nell would have had a very poor share of mother's wit if she had not been able at once to perceive that her appearance made a profound and startling impression on the two sisters.

"She certainly has some style," was the first involuntary thought that rose in the mind of Julia.

"What a figure she would be in a ball-room!" thought Lucy.

She wore a soft warm dress that almost matched her

hair, and made an exquisite contrast with her clear skin; and her bright fearless eyes looked out from the shadow of a Rembrandt hat.

Not the languid grace of Julia, nor the piquancy of Lucy, could compare with the full rich beauty and perfect physical development of Nell, who had known no soft or easy ways in all her life. She felt instinctively that she was the equal of these dainty ladies, and her self-control came back.

Frank's eyes twinkled; he was enjoying his triumph.

"Our brother has been rather hard upon us," began Julia in a slightly frigid tone, when the formal greetings were over. "Indeed, I think I must say that he has treated us a little brusquely. Positively, Miss Haffenden, he never gave us an inkling as to his intentions. We knew nothing at all until he wrote a couple of days ago to tell us that he was engaged to be married."

"It *was* shabby of him, wasn't it now?" said Lucy, appealing to Nell. "I hope your brothers are more confiding with you, Miss Haffenden."

"I have not any brothers," answered Nell; "and as far as shabby treatment goes, I did not get much warning myself. Indeed," she added naïvely, "ten days ago I did not know much more than you."

"The whole matter was almost inspirational in its suddenness," explained Frank.

"We do not even know, Miss Haffenden," said Julia, with a faint flush rising in her pale cheek, "where my brother was so fortunate as to meet you." This, with the half-petulant, half-innocent tone in which Julia said it, had such a funny sound that every one except the speaker laughed.

"'Twas in a crowd," murmured Frank, who was in a most provoking humour.

"Well, really, it is quite true," laughed Nell. "It was in a crowd, and a queer one too. It was at one of his services."

A perceptible tremor agitated the slender frame of Julia, and Lucy suppressed a deprecatory cough. Was this handsome girl an East Ender after all?

"Frank said, I think, that you were an artist," put in Lucy, who felt that that question must be cleared up at once.

"I am beginning to be a sculptor," replied Nell, and added: "I work at Mr. Harte's studio."

"Mr. Julian Harte's?"

"Yes."

"Indeed! Then you are in good hands."

This put a new complexion on the matter. Every one in society knew Julian Harte, and knew, besides, that he very rarely took a pupil, and never except in a case of very great promise. They did not know who this girl was to whom Frank had so rashly engaged himself, nor who were her parents, nor where she came from, but it was something to learn that she was a pupil of the foremost sculptor of the day.

In the course of some conversation which followed, the ladies learned a little about each other. Nell found out that Frank's sisters were fond of him, and in a certain sense proud of him, but that they did not understand him at all, or appreciate him at anything like his proper worth. She gathered in one way and another that her appearance on the scene had been anticipated with no very friendly feelings, and that neither of the sisters had quite decided as yet on what footing to receive her. She liked Lucy the better of the two, because Lucy, though a giddy and flippant young lady, was not so much disposed as Julia to snub her brother.

As for the sisters, it did not need much intuition on their part to tell them how deeply this handsome girl was in love with their brother, and he with her. Neither could they help perceiving that she was as intelligent as she was good-looking; they saw, in fact, whether they were willing to admit it or not, that Frank had been no fool in his choice. Lucy was more than half disposed to be friends, but Julia, though exceedingly polite, was less easily won.

"I hope, Miss Haffenden," she said, "that Frank does not think so lightly of your future as an artist as to contemplate taking you to that dreadful East End, and appointing you one of the shepherds of his flock."

"I do not aspire to that," said Nell simply.

"Miss Haffenden is sarcastic," observed Lucy, with a demure sort of slyness.

"Indeed, no," answered Nell. "My opinion about such work as your brother's is that there are very few who have

the real gift for it, that for those who have, it is the noblest work under the sun, and that those who have not, had better let it alone. At any rate, let them confine themselves to praising the workers." Nell had no notion of letting Frank be run down by a couple of young ladies (sisters or no sisters) who did not understand his work at all, and could not have done so had they tried.

"Bravo!" said Lucy, who liked people to speak out, whether she were the victim or not.

"Ring for some tea, Lucy," said Julia, who saw that they were approaching delicate ground.

When the conversation was once started Frank had kept himself in the background, perfectly satisfied with Nell's progress.

When the tea-things made their appearance the talk became small, and Lucy, growing confidential, asked Nell in a whisper who designed her dress.

"I designed it myself."

"Gracious! Oh, you are *really* an artist. Will you give me the pattern?"

Soon after this Frank rose to go, and Nell rose with him.

Lucy took Nell downstairs to show her a print she had noticed in the hall, and Julia, with a movement of her eyebrows, signified her wish for a private word with her brother.

"Well?" said Frank, when they were alone.

"She has an air certainly, Frank. But you have not told us who she is."

"She has told you herself," he replied.

"Only that she is in a sculptor's studio. Where does she live? Who are her friends? You say she has no parents, but she must have relatives. She cannot be living alone in London."

"Dear Jule, I cannot give you her biography in a breath. Be content for the present with what you have seen and heard. You have not had a handsomer face nor a sweeter voice in your drawing-room for a long while; you shall know all that you want to know in good time."

But Julia only looked grave, and said that she hoped so.

"I like Lucy better than Julia, and she likes me better," said Nell, when Frank was driving her home. "Was it about me that Julia was talking to you?"

"Yes. She put the inevitable questions."

"What questions, Frank?"

"Who were your parents, and who are your friends, and where you live, and all the rest of it."

"Poor Frank! you couldn't say much to all that."

"Quite as much as I was disposed to. Now, Nell, no misgivings; you made a distinct impression."

But Nell was rather quiet the rest of the way, thinking over this.

"Frank," she said, when he was leaving her, "if I were a doll of a girl who could scarcely open my lips, but had a fortune in my own right, and lived with my parents in Belgrave Square, your sisters would think that you were making a good match, wouldn't they?"

"No doubt, but I have made a better for myself; haven't I, Nell?"

"I don't know; I should like to hope so. Oh, Frank, tell me again that you really think so."

Now, a man of spirit does not like the girl he loves to torment herself with the thought that she is in any way his inferior, and Frank especially liked it the less because he knew that Nell never spoke in this way from any vain or trifling motive. So he said very seriously:

"Nell, dearest, it is I who will be a thousand times the gainer on the day that you let me make you my wife, and if you love me as I know you do, you will speak of this no more."

These things happened in the Christmas week of that fine old-fashioned winter, when the snow lay heavy on the ground and the thermometer was below freezing.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NEW YEAR'S EVE.

ON New Year's Eve Nell was walking sharply home, and turning into High Street, Kensington, she came face to face with Martin Clymo.

Frank was coming to supper again that evening, and she was hurrying home to await him in quiet, so this sudden and unlooked-for encounter with Martin gave her no particular pleasure.

"You here, Martin?" was all she could find to say to him.

"Yes," he answered, and then, after a pause, went on rather awkwardly: "There's something I've been wanting to say. I came along this way thinking I might meet you. I didn't want any listeners, and thought you'd perhaps come into the Park a bit."

Nell hesitated. What did he want? Was he going to try and re-open the old subject which she was determined should be opened no more? It was dark, and she wanted to be at home. Martin noticed her hesitation.

"Are you afraid to walk with me, or ashamed, or don't you care to? I'll go away if you like."

He did not mean to go until he had said his say, but he knew how to soften Nell.

"It is growing late," she said, "and I am expected home. But I will walk a little way with you."

They went toward the main entrance, which was the only gate then open. Martin, however, delayed to speak himself, and they had entered the Park and reached the walk on the far side of the Row before he said anything.

"I thought you had something to say to me," observed Nell a little impatiently. She was getting tired of this.

"So I have, but—I'm loath to say it," he answered.

"Then would it not be best to leave it unsaid? It's not on the—the old subject, is it?"

"No, it's not on the old subject," he said, with some sullenness in his tone. "We've put that behind us, haven't we?"

"Yes; for all time, I hope."

"Then don't you bring it up again, Nell. 'Twasn't me that did it that time, and I'm not quite myself when we get to talking of what's been between you and me."

"I am sorry, Martin; I will not offend again. That subject is no pleasanter to me than to you. But what is it that you have to say to me?"

"I'm coming to it. It's none so pleasant that you need be in a hurry."

Now, a few moments before, Martin had hesitated whether to speak or not. She had looked so light and happy; it seemed a worse sin than ever to strike her happiness from her then. He knew something of the love that she must feel for the man she had promised to marry. She had given *him* a little of her love once, and he knew what wealth she could pour out upon the man who had her whole heart. Cruel to crush her as he had been bent on doing! He had almost thought that he would spare her; but the little word with which she seemed to say to Martin that *his* love was despised had stirred the bad blood in him again, and his jealousy burned ten times hotter than before. If he could not have her himself, it should go hard with him but he would make the parson miss her too.

"I've had a queer tale told me lately, Nell," he began, "and it comes pretty close to you."

"Indeed! What is it?"

"It begins with her that's dead. It says that she that called herself Nell Haffenden's aunt was not her aunt at all—no more than I am."

In this alone there was not much; but it struck a fear into Nell, for she felt instinctively that this was a plot against herself. But above her fear rose her anger. She stopped abruptly and faced Martin.

"What scandal is this that you are trying to forge? This is brave of you, Martin! This is manly! But could you not have left the dead alone?"

"What I have said is true," he answered slowly.

"It is a lie!"

"It's as true as gospel—and there's more to follow."

He looked full at her as he spoke. There was cruelty in the hard lines about his mouth, and no pity in his eyes. Nell's heart began to fail her; she felt that if this man had really got her in his power, he would harm her because she could not love him.

"Can you prove this that you have said?" she asked quietly.

"Ay; and more than that."

"Let me hear what more you have to say," she answered coldly.

"I didn't want to do this, Nell. You've driven me to it. If you'd but have loved me——" he began, and seemed half inclined to cringe to her even then. But she cut him short with a gesture of contempt.

"Let me hear what more you have to say."

"Why, then, I've learned this—that she that called herself your aunt was not the woman she was thought to be. She bore an honest name and a clean character, didn't she? Well, she'd no right to them. I've found out where she lived before she went north and settled on my farm. She left that place in a hurry, and for no good reason, and she got as far away as she could. The neighbours had found her out for what she was, and the place had got too hot to hold her."

Martin told his story jerkily, and with thick, constrained utterance. It was a dirty task he had taken in hand, even to him, whose love had grown bitter with treason. He made a pause, and Nell said:

"You are telling me some cruel things about one whose memory is very dear to me, and I like you none the better for it. But, except that I loved my aunt dearly, how does this touch me?"

"Because 'twas you that brought her shame upon her!"

"You villain! How dare you!"

She flushed crimson to the roots of her hair, and seemed to stand an inch taller than he as she confronted him.

"I thought it might be best for you to know of this," he added, with malignant coolness, "before you got too fond of Lyne."

"Let that name alone, it is too high for such as you to utter. Ah! I see you now, coward. This is a scheme of yours to come between us. But there is nothing you can say or do that will make him love me one jot less."

"Not so fast, Nell; and keep your anger cool awhile. You don't know what it is I've told you. I'll be a bit rounder. Do you think your parson, with his good birth and his title that's coming, would like his wife and his children's mother to be base-born?"

She turned white this time, and her heart grew suddenly sick. She had scarcely breath to falter, "What do you mean?"

"Your mother was Sarah Haffenden, that was never wedded."

The pity was stifled in him; if there had been any left, he must have used it then. She looked so stricken, with the red in her cheeks turned ashen, and her lips bloodless. She laid her hand instinctively for support on the iron railing beside her.

"Can you prove this?" she said, in a whisper; and her voice sounded far-off and strange.

"Yes; but why should I? Can *you* disprove it?"

"My aunt's brother was my father, and his lawful wife, Ann Haffenden, was my mother," she answered; but she spoke faintly and without decision, for her mind like her body was deadened, and she doubted everything.

His answer cut her like a knife.

"*Ann Haffenden had no children.*"

A shudder that lasted but an instant seized her, and was so violent that she seemed about to fall. He put out his arm as though to support her. In that moment she turned on him like a fury.

"Stand from me! You are viler to me than a leper. Go!—go! I hate you. But I pity you more, for though you have made me miserable, and my misery will last, it will be nothing to what you shall feel yourself. Oh, cruel

creature—what had you to gain in this? But this is your vengeance; well, look at it and let it comfort you. Are you satisfied? But go, I tell you, or I shall hurt you, for your coward's face maddens me!"

But he did not move. Her passion, that at first had cowed him, had ended by producing a different effect. He felt, as she flamed upon him with her angry eyes and cheeks to which the blood had rushed again, that he loved her a thousand times more hotly than he had ever done before. He resolved on one despairing effort. He believed that so far as Lyne was concerned he had ruined her love; but something within him whispered, "You love her the best, try her now; she knows that she's lost to him."

"Nell," he cried; "Nell, say what you like to me; I deserve it; but I've done it for love of you. Nay, don't shrink from me, it's true. God! there is no one in the world can love you like as I do. See here, Nell; every word of that damned tale is true; bitter true. I swear to it. But see, I think noane of it, I love you the same. You're dead to th' parson now; you cannot marry him. Come back with me; come back home, Nell; I'll marry you, I'll marry you to-morrow."

His passion worked on him—it seemed to sting and madden him like a serpent's bite. His voice had grown hoarse, his limbs trembled, and there was moisture on his brow. He started forward and would have clasped her in his arms; but she, who had heard him only with feelings of loathing, recoiled with an exclamation of horror.

"Wretch! you must insult me, too!" she cried, and half in self-defence and half in obedience to a sudden fierce impulse, she raised her gloved hand and struck him in the face.

He took the blow without flinching. It did not soften, but it sobered him. He saw that the game was lost to him; and without another word he turned and slunk away into the dark.

She did not deign to look after him; she cared not where he went, so that he went from her. For a moment she felt a sense of relief, almost of comfort; then the hideous thought of what he had told her rushed into her

mind, and she leaned sick and faint against the railing, and moaned aloud.

Her wretchedness was so utter that she did not feel the cold, though it was bitter, and her hands and feet were growing numb. Overhead the wind whistled through the leafless trees; there was no other sound, except when Nell moaned aloud.

By-and-by she began to walk slowly up and down. The movement quickened her thoughts, and as the scene she had just gone through rose up again before her mind, she felt her shame with a keener and more poignant sense than at first.

"Do you think your parson would like his wife and his children's mother to be base-born?"

She shrank from herself, as she had shrunk from Clymo, when his cruel words came back to her again; and she kept repeating the last word to herself—"base-born, base-born"—though every time she said it it hurt her like a whip.

She was walking on without aim or heed, when a man came out of the dark and passing close beside her, said something which she did not hear. She made no answer, and the man went on. But it recalled her to herself, and reminded her where she was. She turned to go home.

Home! No, she could not go there; for Frank was coming, and she must not see Frank. How miserable she must have been, when not even this thought could wring the tears from her eyes.

But if she did not go home, where should she go? She burned with shame every time that she thought of herself and her state. She could not go to her friends, there was not one of them she dared face.

Then she resolved to go home, and let herself in quietly, and hide away in her own room. When Frank came they would say that she had not returned, and he would wait for a while and go away. It would be the first time that she had broken faith with him; but what did that matter, now that Frank and she were dead to one another?

She got home as fast as she could, and let herself in without being heard. The door of the dining-room was

standing open, there was no one there, and she went in. A letter lay on the table addressed to her. She took it up with a cry of pleasure; it was from Frank, and the first he had written to her. Then a chill feeling crept over her: had *he* heard, and was this to say to her what she had already resolved to say to him? Oh, no, it was not possible that Frank should be cruel too; she tore the envelope and read:

"SWEETHEART,

"I cannot go to you to-night. I am this moment called to a sick-bed, and, from what I gather about the case, I am likely to be there until morning. Our next meeting will be the sweeter, and you shall punish me as you like. A Happy New Year to my darling. Ah! Nell, dear, it dawns brightly for you and for me.

"FRANK.

"I cannot kiss your lips to-night, but I kiss the paper that your hands will touch."

She took the letter and went softly upstairs and locked herself in her room. She had left a line in pencil on the table to say that she was unwell, and would not be down again.

She lighted her candle, and sat down with her dear letter before her. She read it a score of times, but each time the pain of it was greater than the pleasure; and at length she got up and locked it away. She could bear no longer to read the words of his love when she felt that she must no more listen to them from his lips. For she was clear in her own mind that such a woman as she had found herself to be must never marry such a man as Frank Lyne. He was her lover no more; she was his Nell no more.

But the bitterness of it! To have him for one short week, and to lose him; to lose him with his first love-letter just put into her hand. She sat silent and still during three hours of sheer suffering. Then the stress of unspoken misery grew sharper than she could bear.

"My letter! my letter! I must see it again," she cried; and unlocked her desk and took it out eagerly, and kissed the paper all over, that her lips might touch where his had

touched. Then with a cry which seemed to tear her heart she put it from her, and her head fell forward, and sobs came which made her whole frame quiver.

In an interval of her paroxysm she lifted her head and listened, for a clash of sweet sounds seemed suddenly to fill the air.

She rose and opened the window, and listened again. It was the bells of London ringing in the New Year.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

NEW YEAR'S DAY.

NELL had slept but an hour or two when she awoke with a start, and was conscious of two things—a pain that ached through all her body, and a vague sense of wonder at the cause of it. What was it that made her feel so miserable?

And there was a faint yellow light in her room—what was the meaning of that? She turned half round, and saw the candle glimmering in the socket.

The sight of it aroused a part of her intelligence; but her mind was still confused and numbed. She had been up very late the night before. What for?

She stirred herself, and sat up in bed. The window was open, and a cold air blowing in. It was dark outside, but she could hear footsteps in the street; there were voices, too; and one called out:

"A Happy New Year!"

Her senses quickened a degree, and she shivered; had not some one wished *her* a Happy New Year the night before?

Then her glance fell on a crumpled letter that lay upon the table, and in an instant she remembered all.

It was Frank's first love-letter. He had written to say that he could not come to supper; he had sent kisses to her, and wished her a Happy New Year; he had said that the year dawned brightly for him and for her.

This, then, was New Year's Day; and on this day she was more alone in the world than she had ever been before—for she had lost Frank.

She got up from bed, and threw on a wrapper that

reached to her feet. It was thick and warm, but as she fastened it about her she shivered again, and her teeth chattered. She seemed to be leaving bed for the first time after some great sickness.

She lit a fresh candle, and went across the room, and stood at the window, where she had stood a short time before. London was wrapped in its own stillness; she looked up at the wide dark sky, where the little quiet stars shed each his lonesome light; and down on the huge city, whose turmoil was hushed to perfect peace.

She closed the window, and turned away; and as she did so she caught a sight of her face in the glass, and gave an involuntary start. It was deathly white, except for the great purple rings under the eyes, and there were wrinkles on the forehead, and the mouth was drawn and hard.

"It is like the face of an old woman," she thought.

A fire was laid in the grate. She lighted it, and sat, or rather crouched beside it, though she felt no warmth from the flame. She sat there a long while, no conscious thought quickening her brain, and her body almost rigid.

Then she roused herself for the second time, and began again to move about the room. She felt that if she did not move, her wits would leave her before the day came.

Faint lines of light began to stretch along the sky, and she dressed herself, and sat down at the table, with Frank's letter before her. She prayed that she might cry again, as she had cried the night before; and she did cry, but more gently; and her mind grew clearer and calmer, and she took up her pen to write to Frank.

Every word that she wrote wrung her heart, and more than once she put down the pen and said she could not do it; but she forced herself, and at length she finished. Then she folded and sealed the letter; it seemed almost like preparing her own death-warrant.

By this time it was daylight, and she opened her door and went downstairs. Joe was already astir.

"The days not long enough now to waste in bed, eh? A Happy New—— Why, what's the matter? You're ill."

"I've had a bad night."

"Good Heavens! I should think so. But go to bed again. Why did you get up? Why didn't you ring up

every one in the house to wait on you? I know a thing or two about sickness myself."

"You couldn't have helped me; and I am better up than in bed. The sight of you does me good."

"If you are sick, I wish, in God's name, that you could put it all on to me. But you must not be sick; is this a time for sickness?"

"Have no fear, I am not going to be sick. I have had the worst night I've ever known, but it's over now. Say nothing about it. Let us go downstairs, and you shall make me a cup of tea."

In Joe's den below stairs the fire was already lighted, and they went in there. She often sat with him here in the evenings. There was an old leather chair, wide and low, which he always gave her to sit in, and called it her throne. When they were together here, he called her queen, and she called him colonel.

He made tea for her, and as she drank it slowly the warmth revived her, and she lost something of the dead-white look that had frightened Joe. But she still looked wretchedly; and he thought, "A bad night doesn't do all that."

Presently she said, "Why don't you wish me a Happy New Year, colonel?"

"I've done it; at least, I began to; but you looked so bad that I couldn't finish. Ah! queen, if wishing were all, what wouldn't I bring about for you!"

"You good colonel, I know it. Well, a Happy New Year to *you*, colonel."

"Every day of the year that I'm near you is New Year's Day to me."

"What nice things you say, colonel! Do I look so bad now?"

"Not quite; but pretty bad, all the same."

"I feel better, though. What o'clock is it?"

"Half-past eight."

"It's time we made tea for the general. Have you looked in on her yet?"

"No. I wished her a Happy New Year through the keyhole, but she told me to go away. Put some more tea in, queen, and I'll make the toast. By the way, we had the

loveliest supper ready last night, and *he* never came after all. How was that?"

"He was kept away. He had to go to a sick bed, and expected to be there all night."

"Well, the supper can keep. We'll have it to-night instead. You'll go over there to his service this morning, I suppose. Get him to come this evening."

All this was torture to Nell. Her voice did not shake in the least, but her hand did, and Joe noticed it.

"I don't think I shall go out at all to-day," she said. "And—I don't think he will be able to come here this evening."

Her tone was altered, and Joe took the first opportunity to look narrowly at her. Her face told tales; the expression was there again that had frightened him at first.

"Is it *that?*" he thought; and the good heart within him bled at the mere notion.

"Queen," he said, looking full at her, "is anything wrong?"

She lifted her eyes, grown heavy again, and saw a world of pity in his kindly face, and answered, "Yes, colonel."

"Won't you tell it to me, queen?"

But she did not speak.

"Queen," said Joe again, "the man does not live that loves you better than I do. There is love, and love, you know; and mine is a different sort from *his*. But, queen, when you're glad it's a good time with me; and when things don't go right with you, it's pretty much as bad with me. I know every look that's ever on your face, and I knew when I saw you this morning that something bad was the matter. Won't you tell me what it is, queen?"

"I can't," she said wearily. "I can't tell you; at least not now; I dare not. No one has been kinder to me than you, colonel. You must be kinder than ever just now, and not ask me this."

"I'll do anything and everything you want," answered Joe. "But I should be all the happier if I could share this with you."

"I know you would; but no one can share it with me. Be a good colonel, and let me forget it while I am with you.

There is the general's bell; she wants her breakfast. Fetch the tray, and I'll take it to her."

Teresa, too, noticed the change in Nell's appearance, and asked the cause; but Nell put her off with the answer she had first given to Joe; and as the early morning was always rather an unsympathetic time with Miss Gripp, she escaped further questioning for the present.

It was Sunday, and she was glad that she had not to go to the studio; but her heart ached at the sound of the bells ringing for church, for it was Frank's turn to take the Ragged Service that morning, and she had promised to be there.

What would he think about her absence? Would he think that she was angry because of *his* absence the night before? No, she knew that he had fuller trust in her than that. Would he think that she was ill? He might do that; and if he did, would he come to see her? She longed so to see him, and yet she hoped that he would not come; and then she remembered what day it was, and that he could not possibly come on Sunday. She was glad, and yet she cried until her eyes were red because he could not come.

It was a little comfort, though, to think that she must see him very soon. He would come when her letter reached him. He would get her letter to-morrow; to-morrow, then, he would come to her.

But would he? Perhaps not. It was a strange, vague letter that she had written him, she thought. What would he make of it? She wished that she had written more fully --that she had told him all; and yet how could she have put the shame of her story into words upon paper? And yet she must tell it to him when he came. How would she ever do it?

But when she had gone over the whole tale again, and looked at it and at her own position in the worst of all lights, she could not but think that Frank, if he loved her as she loved him, would still try to bring her back again. What should she do, then?

Ah! there would come the bitterest part of the struggle,

and if Frank tempted her, would strength be given her to resist?

How she longed for some strong arm to lean upon then, some mother's neck to throw herself upon, and tell everything, and ask for counsel and guidance. She had never felt really alone before. Oh! if what she had heard were true, how hardly that old friend in whom she had trusted had used her! But she could not believe it; her whole nature revolted from the thought of it. It was not true—it was true—it could not be true. So she tormented herself from hour to hour all through the day, and grew sick and fretful, and wore herself out completely.

"You are sick and out of sorts, dear. What have you been doing with yourself?" asked Miss Gripp in the afternoon; and went on, "You have had too much excitement. Well, well, one can't get engaged for nothing. Shall my brother go round to the chemist and get you a soothing draught?"

"No, dear Miss Gripp; it wouldn't soothe me at all. You are not to mind me. To-morrow I shall be quite well, when I can get to work again. Now, lie down on the sofa, and I will read you to sleep. What do you do, Miss Gripp, when you feel completely upside-down?"

"I have found Selby's Salvation Syrup an almost infallible restorative, dear."

In the evening, after tea, when she was alone again, there came a knock at the front door, and a voice which she could not quite distinguish, inquired for her. It threw her into a fever of excitement. It could be no one but Frank. He had not had her letter yet, but he had missed her in the morning, and had come to see her.

Footsteps came up the stairs toward her room. At another time she would have recognised in an instant that they were lighter than Frank's, but now she longed so to see him that she could imagine no other visitor.

The door opened, and Horace came in. An instinct of fear overcame her; she forgot her own trouble and ran toward him with outstretched hands. "Oh, Horace, what is it? Is anything the matter with Frank?"

"See these lovers!" exclaimed Horace. "Separate

them for twelve hours, and they will feed on the most horrible imaginings every minute of the time."

"Oh, Horace, I am so glad you've come."

"Eh! Why, I declare there *is* something the matter. What is it, Nell?"

"I am miserable, Horace; oh! so miserable."

And she went and sat down, and the tears that she had tried to restrain broke out, and she cried like a child.

"Dear Nell, what has happened?"

"I do not know how to tell you, Horace; but—but Frank and I can not be anything to each other any more."

"My God! What do you mean? You love him still, surely?"

"Oh, Horace!"

"And as for Frank, there never was a man so hopelessly in love. I thought he would have broken down this morning, because you were not there. What do you mean, Nell?"

"I mean this—that last night I learned that I was no fit wife for Frank, and that I wrote to tell him so before I went to bed."

Horace stared at her in utter bewilderment. She spoke quietly and decisively, but there was a strange unsettled expression in her eyes, and her face was so pale and worn. That a revolution of some kind, and a terrible one, had taken place in her within the last few hours, was evident, and it seemed almost to have turned her brain. But Horace was utterly at a loss for the key to the mystery.

"You speak a riddle to me, Nell," he said gently. "Who has told you that you are not a fit wife for Frank?"

"Martin Clymo."

"He! Tush! You do not think of what he says? He is jealous because you refused him."

"I know that. It is the reason he has been able to tell me this. He has taken the trouble to find it out because he meant that if I would not marry him, I should marry no one."

"But what has he found out? What has he told you?"

"If I tell you, you will despise me as much as I despise myself."

"You have no right to despise yourself, for you could do nothing despicable. Come, Nell, you must tell me what this is?"

Then, as well as her lips could frame it, she told the story she had learned from Martin. She watched Horace closely while she was speaking, that she might note the effect of her words on him. He was a good deal taken aback; and Nell thought that his manner of receiving her story confirmed her own anticipations. "But he is quite right," she thought. "It is what they will all think."

To him she said: "Well, Horace, your face tells me that I was right in what I said at first."

"No, Nell, no; don't say that. Can this be a true story?" he said slowly.

"I see no way to disprove it," she answered.

His knowledge of the world was enough to tell him that if this were really true, it gave a good deal of ground for Nell's wretchedness. She was right in thinking that it would be a grave matter to stain an unblemished escutcheon with the bar sinister. This Clymo was a sharp fellow. If he had not tried to gain his end by a mere bold lie, he had got hold of a strong card and played it cleverly. He had husbanded and brought it out in the nick of time.

Horace knew the misery that Nell was suffering, and his heart ached that he saw no way to lighten it.

"Have I not done right, Horace?" she said, with a faint, sad smile.

"You have done bravely," he answered. "But I don't know that you have done quite wisely."

"What should I have done?"

"I think I would have kept it from him for a while. We might have proved it false."

"Oh, Horace, if we could do that! But I could not have kept it from Frank. Even if I had tried to do so, I could never have been the same to him while this was lying over me; and he would have known that I was deceiving him about something. What will he say when he gets my letter, Horace?"

"He will believe nothing until he has seen you."

"He will not think that I am false to him?"

"How can he? He will come straight to learn what it means from your own lips."

"I don't know what I shall say, Horace."

"Leave that to him," said Horace.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NELL AND HORACE BECOME RIVALS.

ON her way to the studio the next morning, Nell was in a mood in which the thought of work was not only stimulating but absolutely necessary to her. Grief, brooded over through two nights and a day, was already producing mischievous effects, and she felt the imperative need of some strong counteracting influence. Ten days ago, in the first great happiness of love, she had been half disposed to slight her artist's ambition; now she wanted it to put in the place of the love that was lost to her.

As she went through the cloisters she heard the sharp sound of the chisels. She opened the door of the great room where Harte worked, through which she had to pass to reach her own. It seemed an age since she had been there last, though but a day had intervened. The life of the studio, with all its own peculiar charm, was just opening. She saw the tall, quaint figure of the old Chief bending over his work, his long, grave face intent upon it. The heterogeneous assemblage of clay and plaster figures, many of which were like old friends, looked out at her from their several places. A great fire burned in the wide grate. Through the half-open door of a small room beyond two young Italian assistants could be seen "pointing" a figure of heroic size. Mrs. Harte sat at her easel in her own room; the bright light filling every corner of the studio, the warm, soft air, the friendly faces, the well-known sights and sounds, made it all seem like coming home after a long and troubled absence.

"I have a new year's gift for you, young lady," exclaimed the Chief, looking up from his work.

"It will be the first I have had. What is it, please?" said Nell.

"Look here; what do you say to this?" and opening a newspaper which lay on a scale-stool beside him, he pointed to a marked paragraph on the centre page, which stated that the Corporation of London were about to institute a public competition for a statue of John Wiclif, "the morning star of the Reformation," to be placed in the Guildhall.

The author of the best model would receive an honorarium of a hundred guineas, though the Corporation would not bind themselves to accept his design, unless it were entirely approved by the judges. Three months would be allowed for the sending in of models.

"Your first opportunity," said the Chief. "Now, what do you say? Will you set to work at once?"

"Do you really mean that I ought to?"

"To be sure I do! It is one of the few chances you may have for a long while to come. Many of us have got our first start by coming out successfully in an affair of this sort. We're not very busy just now. If you go to work at once you'll have time to spoil three or four designs between this and April. What do *you* say, wife?" he called to Mrs. Harte.

"I think Nell should certainly try," replied Mrs. Harte. "You see, dear," she went on, "you are better placed than some who have won their first success in this way. The hardship of these competitions is when a young artist, whose commissions are just sufficient to find him in bread-and-cheese, has to throw over everything for this one chance, in the hope that success, if he be successful, may make the turning-point in his career. Your state is not so desperate as that, thank goodness; and this is an opportunity which you ought not to throw away."

"Well, of course I should like to try," said Nell; "but what chance have I against all the sculptors in London?"

"Dear lady, you don't think they will all run for this prize!" laughed Harte. "We old ones haven't the

pluck for it. No; I know every one who will enter, and you have as good a chance as most of them."

"Will Horace try?"

"I dare say he will."

"Well, as if I could compete with Horace!"

"Very good. Then Horace shall be first, and you shall be second. How will that suit you?"

"I should be quite content with that."

"Good. Now, then, you have full permission to waste as much clay as you like over the Morning Star. Salary as usual in the meantime. Be good enough to shut yourself in your room, and admit no visitors. You have a terrible time before you, and during the first period of creating, one should turn hermit."

Nell turned to go to her room.

At this moment the door of the studio opened, and the threshold was darkened by the burly and most untidy figure of Mr. Bledsoe, the celebrated critic.

"Hang me if I don't feel choke-full of religion whenever I come to this place," said Mr. Bledsoe, by way of greeting. "Cloisters! what d'ye want with cloisters? Is that a kettle by the fireplace? Is it a ridiculous 'property' kettle, with a confounded hole in the bottom, or is it capable of ministering to the thirst of man?"

"We will have it filled at once, Mr. Bledsoe," replied Mrs. Harte.

"I will fill it for you myself, Mr. Bledsoe," said Nell.

"You shall not do so. I will go thirsty rather. Well, a Happy—New— Have ye heard about this rascally competition, eh?"

"Now, Bledsoe, no hard words about that. Here we have just persuaded Miss Haffenden to become a competitor."

"Intolerable! I will not hear of it. These Corporation competitions must be squashed. They suck the blood and brains of young artists."

"They are one of the high-roads to success in our craft," said Harte.

"They are an infernal blind alley! And what a subject! Wic—lif! an old hook-nosed man in a hideous straight coat! Can you put beauty into that? No. What the mischief *can* you put into it?

"He really was a very great man, you know, Mr. Bledsoe," said Mrs. Harte.

"He is not a fit subject for sculpture," insisted the critic.

"He was 'the morning star of the Reformation,'" said Nell.

"He was all nose," growled Mr. Bledsoe.

"It is very unkind of you to discourage me, Mr. Bledsoe," said Nell.

"I discourage you? I—Bledsoe? Go in and win. That is what I tell you. But when you have won, don't let them beat you down over the price. That is what they do when a youngster wins. Ah, the Corporation, the big bellies! When shall the prophecy be fulfilled, and strangers occupy the waste places of their fat ones?"

Nell went into her room, and began her preparations for work. It was a little room in comparison with the great one which the Chief occupied, but a good-sized place nevertheless, and very bright and cheerful, with the marks of a womanly taste about it. She put off her hat and cloak, and tied on a voluminous apron, under which her dress was completely hidden, and put back her sleeves a little, to give full play to her wrists. This she did almost mechanically, for she was not just then in the cue for her regular work.

It was a task, however, in which she was very much interested, and though she did not mean to work on it that day, she went across to where the figure stood on its pedestal in the centre of the room, ghost-like with the damp cloths about it; and a soft expression came into her face as she unpinned and took the cloths away. It was a portrait bust of Mabel, and bid fair to be an excellent piece of work, though it was yet in quite an immature stage. She had begun this when she found that Horace and Mabel were in love with each other, and though she had not told Mabel what she purposed, she meant it for their wedding-present. She worked on this only when she was in her best mood, and did not mean to touch it to-day. So, after moistening it afresh, she covered it again, and began to think of the new work that had been suggested to her.

What a zest it would have had for her, a month ago, she thought. Then she was all ambition ; there seemed nothing grander than a great success in art ; she was not the least daunted by what they told her, that for the sculptor a great success is hardly possible in England. She knew that a few here and there had won it, and even if the sculptor's fame must be confined within the narrow circle of those who were alone capable of really knowing and caring for his work, there was something noble in that. Sculpture is essentially the classical in art, and, nowadays, at all events, it is scarcely possible that its intelligent admirers should be legion. Harte was known and honoured of a few, and the disciple did not covet a wider honour than the master's.

But she did not think about success now as she had done then. Then she thought of it as the all-in-all ; she wanted it now only to fill an aching void. Indeed, for success at all she fancied that she cared but little ; what she needed was the stay and stimulus of active work.

She took a pencil and a sheet of paper, and stood up at a high wooden desk to jot down some notions of the work she was going to compete for. But she broke off before she had well begun. "What an absurdity!" she said. "Here am I diligently beginning to plan a statue of a person I know nothing about. Mr. Harte," she called, opening the door of her room, "what *was* Wiclif like?"

"He was all nose!" replied the Chief, imitating the dyspeptic growl of Mr. Bledsoe.

"I don't believe any of you know anything about him. But tell me, please, how does one set about a work of this kind?"

"Oh! it will be no end of an undertaking," said Mrs. Harte. "You will have to go to the Museum and all the libraries, and read up Wiclif and his times in all the books you can find, from the oldest to the newest. You'll have to get all the portraits and compare them, and all the personal descriptions and compare them, and make the best Wiclif you can out of them. You'll have to work up costumes, and a lot of other things."

"There will be plenty to do in that, I expect," said Nell, in a tone of satisfaction.

"Ah! you don't know what you are in for, I can assure

you. I only hope you will speak as cheerfully in a month's time."

"My dear," said her husband, "don't discourage her. Miss Haffenden," he went on in a serious tone, "if you work sixteen hours a day, giving your attention to nothing else, you will be ready in plenty of time."

"Why, you are worse than Mr. Bledsoe, both of you! But you can't frighten me. I shall finish it if I begin, whether I work sixteen hours or twenty. I expect I shall have to do Horace's research as well as my own."

"Yes," said Harte, "I can hardly realise our lazy friend wading through the Wiclifian literature in the British Museum, even with the aid of one of its intelligent assistants."

Nell went back to her own room. She was restless, and full of vague troublous longings, and could settle to nothing. The quiet life of the studio flowed on around her; she seemed to have no part in it that day; it had soothed her at first, now it began to irritate her. She wanted to work, but could not give her mind to it. She went up and down the length of the studio, and from one to another of the rooms, her hands behind her, her eyes everywhere, but seeing nothing. Harte thought she was excited about the Wiclif, and let her wander as she pleased. But she had forgotten Wiclif; she was thinking of her lover.

Suddenly it came into her mind—"He has had my letter this morning!" This threw her again into a fever of curious speculation. It was nearly four hours since he must have had the letter. What had he been doing all that time? How often had he read it, and with what feelings? Had he answered it already? or was he waiting to see her? She would see him or hear from him that night, and she longed for the darkness which would herald his message or his coming.

Oh! if he were coming, and coming as at other times; and in the quiet of her own room she closed her eyes for a moment, and a sweet languor stole over her, and she felt his arm about her, and his lips at hers, and heard his voice, which said: "Nell, my beautiful Nell, how I do love you!" And she opened her eyes, and it was a dream.

But the day wore on, though she thought that it would never end. At about four Harte looked in on her, and

seeing that she had not yet exhausted her restless mood, he said :

"Still in the throes of invention? Well, it's a tremendous time, especially when you're not used to it. But it's a time when you mustn't coop yourself up; you want air, air, air. You want to have the wind blowing on you, a nice little north wind ; let it blow on your face; run about in it; stamp with your feet, and get the blood to boil; it's wonderful how you can make ideas flow under that treatment. You look quite serious and pale about it; I'm going to send you away at once. Be so kind as to put on your hat and cloak, and take a scamper round the garden ; and then come in here and have some tea ; and then run home, and don't think any more about Wiclif to-night."

But it might have been better for her peace of mind if she could have thought a little more about Wiclif than she did.

She took the Chief's advice, however, for it was always good, and having walked herself into a fine heat and drunk some tea—how pleasant those afternoon teas at the studio always were !—she set out on her way home.

She went the straightest road that evening, and was not long in getting there. She was earlier than usual, so Joe was not in to greet her, as his general habit was. "Is there a letter from Frank?" was her first thought. There was none downstairs. She ran up to her own sitting-room, and a letter was lying upon the table. Her heart sank within her at the sight of it. Why had he written instead of coming? She reached out her hand for the letter, and saw that it was not from Frank. She threw it from her impatiently, and without another glance; and an exclamation half of disappointment and half of weariness broke from her. Was she never to have news of Frank again? And then she fell to chiding herself for her own contrariness. She was so sick and angry that he had written instead of coming; angry and sick that he was coming instead of writing.

"I am a miserable fool! I thought myself in love when I had Frank all for my own; but I never knew how much I was in love until now that he is lost to me. Oh, wretched, wretched—when will this be over?"

She went downstairs, and was not in her own room again for two hours or more. The letter was lying where she had thrown it. She took it up again, and then for the first time she recognised the writing. It was from Mabel. With a sharp word of self-reproach she opened and read it. There were only a few lines, written in Mabel's round, girlish hand, to say that a letter had arrived from the guardian, and that she wanted to come and tell Nell about it. She would be with her, if possible, early that evening.

Nell looked at her watch; it was half-past seven. Mabel could scarcely be coming. Yes; there was her timid little knock at the hall door, like the tapping of a bird, and her voice asking for Nell.

She ran up the stairs with her dainty, fairy step, pausing a moment at Teresa's room ("It is I, Miss Gripp—Mabel. How are you this evening?") and then racing on to Nell's.

She was in quite a little flutter of excitement.

"I'm late, am I not? But I couldn't help it, you know. I've been to the professor, and had twice as long a lesson as usual. Oh! Nell, there's going to be a special students' concert in the spring, quite a real grand public one, at St. James's Hall, and I am to sing. Think. Shall I ever be able?"

"Of course you will. How splendid! All of us will go to support you. Horace shall take us. There is a prospect to put heart into you!"

"Horace! Oh, Nell—the letter! Such a letter! What do you think he says?"

"That it is all right, and you may marry as soon as you have got your trousseau."

"Oh, dear! if *you* were the guardian, Nell! Why, he won't even answer the question! And he doesn't write to me at all, but sends a quarter of a page to the Superior, wanting to know whom he is to hold responsible for my having gone suddenly and unaccountably mad. Those are his very words, the Superior read me the letter, and she is in a dreadful way about it."

"The ogre! And is that all he says?"

"Oh, no! He says that he gives me half a week to

become sane again, and if he does not hear that I am clothed and in my right mind in three days—— Fancy, Nell, clothed and in my right——"

"He is only quoting Scripture, dear. Go on."

"He will have me sent back to France at once. Oh, Nell!"

Tears during three or four minutes, Nell caressing and soothing her all the while.

"What is to be done now, Nell?" when the shower was over. "It is perfectly and completely and really hopeless. I am sure it is, I know it is. I knew I was born to be miserable."

"Well, dear, he really seems to be a dreadful kind of person. He is fit only to be put in a book. In fact, if he were put in a book you would not believe in him. But I don't see anything hopeless in it yet."

"Why, what can we do now, Nell?"

"You must write to the Superior of the French convent. Didn't you say that your guardian had property near there? She will be almost certain to know everything about you. That is what we ought to have done at first."

"Oh, yes—capital! But suppose she doesn't know anything?"

"Well, then, Horace shall write to the guardian himself. No, better still—he shall go to France and see him. He will be very impatient when he hears this, you may be sure."

"Oh, he must not go to France, Nell. Guardy will eat him alive."

"If it comes to that, Horace shall eat him alive."

"How clever you are, Nell! What beautiful things you do think of!"

"Yes, I think I am better at other people's affairs than at my own," though she was sorry for those words before they were well out of her mouth, for Mabel of course replied:

"What, Nell, and you have just got such a clever, handsome lover all for your own, and everything smooth between you!"

What Nell would have said to this I do not know, but just then a double knock sounded downstairs, and she

started up hot and trembling, and ran to the landing. She heard the letter-box opened, and waited an anxious moment. It was Joe who opened it; and if there were a letter for her he would bring it up. She waited another moment, and heard him go downstairs. She went back pale, and trembling so that she could scarcely stand.

"What is the matter, Nell? Have you had bad news? No, for you have had no letter. What is it, Nell?" exclaimed Mabel, rising from her seat and going to meet her.

"It is nothing, dear—a moment's faintness. I have not been very well to-day. No, I have had no letter, but I have been looking for one all the evening, and became foolishly anxious that moment. It is the last post, you know."

"The last post? No, surely; why, see," said Mabel, taking out her watch, "it is only half-past eight. There will be another post in an hour."

The colour rushed again into Nell's cheeks. She looked at her own watch. Yes, it was only half-past eight. There might be a letter yet; he might even come.

"You are better, dear?" said Mabel.

"Yes, well again, puss. Come downstairs, and play to me for a little before you go. You must not stay late, you know."

"Sister Grace is to call for me at nine, on her way home."

They went downstairs together. Nell shrank from being alone while that terrible feeling of suspense was upon her. Mabel had no music, but she could sing and play by the hour without a note, and she sang such sweet and quiet things as lulled Nell's heart to seeming rest. Then she had to send Mabel away, and when the spell of the music was broken, the evil spirit came back and tormented her again.

Half-past nine, and no letter. But yet he might come. Ten o'clock, and neither letter nor lover. He would not come that night.

She dreaded such another night of misery as the two last had been; but there was no help, and she went blindly upstairs and locked herself into her room, and sank down upon the bed, her body aching as her spirit did.

The minutes moved on, so heavily; the hours crept on, so wearily; the sounds of the night died with the hours, and the "mighty heart" of the city lay quiet.

"Oh, Frank," she moaned, "it can not be that your love is less than mine? You have not let me go already, Frank, my Frank——" and with the name upon her lips, she fell asleep at length.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE LETTER.

On the morning of the day which we have just spent with Nell, Frank Lyne watched eagerly for the post. But it was holiday time, and the post was late, for even in the East some of the seasons are marked after the fashion of the West, and Christmas and the New Year are heavier times than ordinary for the postman.

So, having to be early abroad, Frank must needs endure a little suspense. It was suspense, though of a not very unpleasant kind.

Before nine o'clock he was off to one of his schools; and other items in the work of a busy morning detained him until considerably after midday, when he returned to his bachelor dinner.

The letter he had expected was awaiting him. It was Nell's letter, and the sight of it thrilled Frank with a new pleasure, for it was the first he had had from her. He fingered it softly, and with an almost reverent touch, and held it before him, and turned it this way and that, before he opened it. At length, with a delightful sense of expectancy, he broke the seal, and read:

"Frank dearest,

"Your letter has come to me—your first love-letter, and the first that I have ever had. And, oh! Frank, it is to be the last; for you and I can be lovers no more. Do not ask me to tell you in writing what terrible thing has happened to cut us off from one another in the first week

of our love. I have tried to write it, but cannot. Come and see me again—just once more, Frank, and I will tell you then. And till then, and afterward, and ever, believe that *I* have not changed, nor has my love; and that, though we can never again be what we have been, I am yet and always,

"Your own most faithful

"NELL."

Frank read this through at a glance. He went back and read it over slowly. He read it four or five times, but always with the same sense of utter inability to grasp its meaning. He got up and walked about the room. He sat down again, and read it for the sixth time. The writing was plain and the words clear; but it was a dark puzzle to Frank.

"I have not changed, nor has my love." "You and I can be lovers no more." "Come and see me again—just once more, Frank."

He read these sentences fifty times, until the words swam before his eyes.

"What, in Heaven's name, does it mean?" he broke out at length, in a tone in which anger began to take the place of astonishment. "Who has sent me this? It is not Nell; it cannot be. There is witchery in it; some one is trying to trick me."

Lyne was a man to whom doubt and suspense were intolerable; and he was maddened by the absolute perplexity and bewilderment which the letter produced in him. He could beat out no answer, not even a clue, to the mystery. He chafed under the sense of his own helplessness. He wanted to go off straight and have the matter set clear at once.

Could he not go immediately to Nell herself, and learn what it was from her own lips? Impossible. How could he see her at the studio on such an errand as this? He must wait until evening.

He counted the hours—the minutes almost—until the time when he knew that she would be quitting the studio; and then prepared to start. But at the moment of his leaving the house he was stopped. It was a message from the same sick man on whose account he had been prevented

from going to Nell two nights before. There seemed a fate in it.

The message was urgent; yet Lyne did what he had never done before in such a case—he hesitated a moment before answering the messenger. Then followed a struggle between love and duty, momentary but very sharp. But a man cannot live up to a high ideal of duty all his life, and turn his back upon it in an instant. He ground his teeth, but he went off with the messenger.

It was half-past ten when he was freed from the sick man's bedside; but even at that late hour, bootless as he felt that the journey must be, nothing would satisfy him but to go at once to Brompton.

He must do something, if it were only to stand outside the house and know by the light in her window that she was there. For ten hours he had been enduring the pains of hell—he could not go through the night without an effort, vague and purposeless as this one seemed, to procure some answer to the terrible riddle.

He went, and found it as he had expected. The house was shut and dark, but there was a glimmer of light between the shutters of the topmost room, and he knew that Nell was there. There was some comfort in that, but it was a chill and barren comfort to her lover who stood without, and chafed at his exclusion.

She was thinking of him; but how could he know that? Her eyes were wet with tears; it was for her lover that she shed them; but how should *he* know this?

Nell cried herself to sleep, and Frank turned and went from the house, with miserable, unsatisfied longings in his heart. He had done himself no good by going there; his doubts were not appeased, nor his impatience diminished, and his soul still burned within him.

While he stood irresolute in the road, not caring to go this way or that, and willing least of all to go home in so forlorn and restless a state, he bethought him of Horace. Horace was never in bed at midnight—he would go to him. Perhaps Horace knew something; at any rate it would be good to unpack his heart with such words as he could speak only in the ear of a friend.

The young sculptor had chambers attached to his studio, and thither Frank went.

Horace was up and ready for anything. There was no trouble on that fresh face of his; and to one whose heart was sick and impatient, and his veins burning, it was medicine to see his smile and hear his careless voice.

Frank looked wretchedly, and it was not difficult for Horace, when he admitted him, to divine the cause of his midnight visit.

Some change of countenance, perhaps, or something gentler than ordinary in his manner, told Frank at once that Horace was not a stranger to his trouble, and he began abruptly:

"You know what I have come about?"

"Yes, Frank," answered Horace, "I do. Sit down and let's talk. It never did run smooth, you know, and I suppose it never will. You had better smoke; you look as if it would do you good; and I'll make some coffee. Now, man, be as miserable as you like, but don't give yourself up to despair; we may prove it false yet."

"Prove what false?" asked Lyne quickly.

"Has she not told you everything?" replied Horace.

"It seems to me as though she had told everything without telling anything. Read that," and he took Nell's letter from his pocket, and gave it to Horace.

"She is a very noble girl, Frank," was Horace's answer, when he had read and returned the letter.

"That is a thing you and I need not talk about; for we both know it," returned Frank. "But in God's name, Racy, if you can, tell me what has happened. You see what she says there. She cuts me off from her at a word, without note or warning. What does it mean? Have you seen her? Has she spoken to you? What curse is it that has fallen on us?"

"I have seen her, and she has spoken to me. What she has done, Frank, she has done from the highest motive. The reason of it all is that she has heard a terrible story about herself, and sees no course open after hearing it but to break off her engagement with you. She is as miserable as you are, and it is more for your sake than for hers that she has done this; she sacrifices her own happiness to your honour. That is what the letter means."

"But you have told me nothing—nothing at all," said Lyne impatiently. "What is it that she has heard?"

"That she is of illegitimate birth."

Lyne looked at his friend with a strange, angry, incredulous expression, and said slowly:

"What is that you say?"

Horace told him again.

"Nell—my Nell? Is it of her that you say this?"

"It is not I who say it, Frank."

"Who says it?"

"It is a fellow of the name of Clymo who has told it to her."

A pause followed this. Lyne was slowly and unwillingly comprehending what his friend had told him. His face showed the violence of his feelings. He was not thinking of himself at that moment; he was burning with shame and indignation, that the woman he loved should have had to endure such words as these.

"Was no one there to cut the villain's tongue out?" he said, speaking rather to himself than to Horace.

Presently he said: "Who is this Clymo? Stay, I think she spoke to me of him once. Did she not know him in the country?"

"Yes; they have known one another from children. He was in love with her."

"In love with her? But she did not care for him?"

"No, she would have nothing to say to him on that score. He followed her to town, and it was after he heard from her of her engagement to you that he told her this."

"Ha! are you sure of that?"

"Yes, that is what Nell says."

"Why, then, the thing explains itself. See, Racy, can't you understand what he has done? He is mad with jealousy, and has forged this clumsy tale, thinking to spoil her for me."

Lyne spoke excitedly; this was a ray of hope, and it lighted up his whole countenance.

But Horace said: "The worst of it is, Nell herself does not believe that the story is a forgery. She says he proved it to her, and that she knows it is true."

"She cannot know it. It is a lie; I know it is. This fellow is a villain; he must be. My darling! it must almost have killed her—the purest heart that ever beat,

Racy;" and Lyne clenched his hands and groaned in his pain.

"Have you written to her, Frank?" asked Horace.

"How could I write? I have been like a madman ever since I had her letter. I hardly believed until now that it was Nell who wrote it."

"And you have not seen her?"

"No; not seen her, either;" and Lyne related all that had passed with him since midday.

"She will be distracted," said Horace. "You must see her as soon as possible."

"I shall go to-morrow. I wish it were possible to carry the proofs of Clymo's lie with me. But I shall do that the next time."

"You are convinced, then, that this is a conspiracy of his?"

"I believe it to be nothing else. She says that he proved it to her; but was she fit to weigh evidence at such a time? It is to me that he must prove his case next; that will not be so easy for him. You say that he has only just told her this; then we may guess that he will wait awhile to watch the course of affairs, and that he is in London still. Does Nell know where he lives?"

"I can't say; but probably she does. He has been in town a good while. I'm glad you can take so plain and practical a view of it, Frank; Nell and I were dumfounded; we could see only the worst and most hopeless side. But let us take that side for a moment, and suppose the story true; what is to follow then?"

Lyne replied, without a moment's pause: "If it were true a thousand times over, she would be my Nell still, and I would marry her."

Horace laid his hand on his friend's arm, and said quietly: "We must move heaven and earth to prove it false; for if it be true, *she* will not marry *you.*"

"How do you know that?" asked Lyne.

"You have it there," replied Horace, pointing to Nell's letter.

Frank took up the letter, and folded it, and replaced it in his pocket.

"You think so?" he said. "You do not know what her love is for me. *I* do, for I know what mine is for her."

Horace spoke again. "It is that very love of hers which will make her refuse you. If you were a poor man, Frank, with no future to look to, this would not be so serious a matter. But you are heir to a title, and will have an old and honoured name to hand down untarnished to your successors. Would you like, and would Nell Haffenden permit, that your children's mother should be illegitimate?"

For a moment or two Frank made no reply, but sat with knitted brows, and his hands pressed tightly together. Horace's words impressed him the more, because he knew how deep was his regard for Nell.

Then he turned to his friend again, and said: "Well, then, we must sift this thing to the very bottom, and we must prove it false."

They sat on into the morning, until at length Horace got up and stretched and yawned, and said: "Too late and too early to go home, Frank; we'll rig up another bed, and one of us can camp here before the fire. It will be like the old days in Florence—heigho! what a long way off those days are now! Where did I stow that second mattrass, I wonder?"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

HOPE.

A WINTRY sun was shining into Nell's room the next morning when she awoke from a late and restless sleep. The quick rat-tat of the postman sounded from door to door through the street. Nell sprang out of bed, for the sun generally found her hard at work, and dressing hastily, hurried downstairs with fresh hope in her heart. There *must* be a letter from Frank this morning. But no letters lay on the hall table; she passed into the dining-room and glanced eagerly at her plate before she so much as bid Joe good-morning; it lay empty, and her wistful eyes wandered from that to the chimney-piece. Joe saw that anxious gaze, and said, with as indifferent an air as he could muster:

"No post at all this morning, queen. Have you been working already? You look frozen up."

"No, colonel, I was lazy and overslept myself."

"Well, there's your breakfast warming in the fender. I have to be off for some new slides for Teresa, but you'll find it hot."

"You good colonel, you spoil me altogether."

Joe walked off with a beaming face, and Nell, leaving her breakfast undisturbed in the fender, walked listlessly to the window.

What could Frank's silence mean? Better to have a harsh word of rejection from him than this more cruel silence. Almost before the thought had crossed her mind there was a sharp knock at the front door that made the light leap into her tired eyes. Joe was in the hall, and before Nell

had time to think, Frank was in the room, and beside her, holding her two hands in his, and looking down at her with eyes whose wonted quiet look was replaced by one of passionate love. For two or three blissful moments neither spoke. For Nell the last two bitter days melted into nothingness. Frank was with her, his firm clasp upon her hands; his clear eyes, shining with the strength of his love, looked into hers; she could not be going to lose him, it must have been an evil dream that she had had.

"Is there anything in all the world that could part us two?" said Frank presently. "We cannot part, Nell, you and I."

"Oh, Frank, but if we must! How could I ever tell you? I thought it would be easier to say than to write, but now I cannot say it."

"I know it all, Nell," he answered gently; and then in answer to her questioning look, he added: "Yesterday I could not come in the evening. I did come at eleven o'clock, but it was only to satisfy a mad desire to see the place where you were sleeping. I stood out there in the road, Nell, and watched the light in your room. I could do no more than that. I went to Racy. We talked and he told me all. You say, sweet, that your love for me is not changed; neither is mine for you, by what I heard last night. All that is a lie, you know. You shall see how I will prove it."

The sight of her, and the clasp of her warm fingers had kindled his love anew, and gave him strength and confidence that communicated themselves to her.

"Oh, Frank, how can you do that?" she asked, but her face, lifted to his, was full of the joy and hope that his words inspired. She had such faith in him, she believed he *must* be able to do anything he promised.

"My love for you is a very Goliath. You shall not be slandered, Nell."

Nell let her head rest for a moment on his shoulder with a feeling again of perfect happiness and content. Then she raised it suddenly.

"But if it should not be slander, Frank?"

"Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof, sweetheart; and, come anything come everything, you are still mine, you know."

He said this half-appealingly and half-decisively, and seemed to wait her answer.

She drew herself gently from him and said, with pale determination:

"No, Frank; if it should be true, I am yours no longer. Dearest, let this be known to both of us at once, that unless you prove me wronged, I can never marry you. It may save both of us some pain."

And in his heart he knew that she would stand to her words. He forbore to press her further; there was much to be done before they need talk of parting.

"Tell me," he said, "how Clymo came by his knowledge."

"I do not know, Frank," she answered.

Frank laughed, quite a brisk and cheerful laugh.

"What! you took his bare word for it all? Oh, simpleton!" and Nell laughed as merrily as Frank.

"Now then," he went on, "we will have breakfast before we say anything more about it. You have not breakfasted, neither have I; let us breakfast together, and you can make out a bill for me in the name of Miss Gripp."

"We don't make out bills now."

"Then let me pay at once, and in the way that I like best," said Frank, and gave her two kisses.

"But that won't satisfy Miss Gripp," said Nell, so Frank was obliged to give her a third, solely for the benefit of Miss Gripp, which Nell said was not her meaning at all.

That was a delightful breakfast, long afterward remembered by both of them. They put care aside for the moment; they were lovers again, and when they had finished, much of the old brightness and gaiety had replaced the worn and anxious look on Nell's face. Then Frank began again:

"Tell me all that you know about yourself and your parents, and your old life, Nell; the life you lived before you came up here and changed mine. Then tell me where Clymo lives, for I am going to him next."

"I don't think I like to send you to him. I am afraid of the meeting between you. I want you to remember, Frank, that whatever Martin may be now, and whatever he

may have said or done, he was once a playmate of mine, and there was a time—though I did not know my own feelings then—when it seemed that he might be something more. I was very violent to him on that dreadful evening we have been talking about; I struck him, Frank, and I am ashamed when I think of it. You will behave better than that, I know."

"I don't think you have much to reproach yourself with," said her lover. "But you need not be afraid of a meeting between him and me; we are not like to break the peace. But now tell me—did your aunt never speak to you of your parents?"

"Scarcely ever; and in a very general way. She and my father—her brother—had never been very good friends. They were half at enmity at the time he was drowned at sea, and I think she was very sorry about it afterward, and that it was one reason why she never liked to talk of him. But I think also that it made her kinder to me."

"Where were you born, Nell?"

"I—I don't know, Frank. What did it ever matter to me? I never cared or thought anything about it till now. My aunt took the place of mother, Mr. Meadowsweet was more than father—did I want anything else?"

"Ah! Mr. Meadowsweet. Could he not help us, Nell?"

"Yes, certainly, he might. He knew my aunt the whole time we lived on Martin's farm. I wonder I did not think of asking him before. I will write to him to-day."

They continued talking; and when Lyne had got from her all the meagre details that he could about herself and her antecedents, and cheered her by some more hopeful and helpful words (and perhaps by some other things besides), he left her, himself looking a hundred times more a man than he had done four-and-twenty hours before.

When he was gone Nell sat down and wrote a long letter to the Vicar at Wilton-Henry. She would not give up hope till hope were placed beyond her reach. Frank's visit had lightened her heart and inspired her with fresh courage; and it was good to see with what a light step and sunny face she passed down the cloisters to the studio and donned her working gear, prepared to tackle John Wiclif with her wonted energy. Mrs. Harte was not at work that

day, and Julian was very busy undoing the error of an assistant on an important figure just approaching completion, so Nell was left quite to her own devices.

After several hours of steady work, she decided to give up for the day, and run down to the convent, and get leave for Mabel to go for a walk with her in the Park. Being in a more hopeful mood, she longed to pour out her heart to Mabel and receive the sympathy of that warm little friend.

"Oh, Nell, it was good of you to come and get me such a treat as this!" exclaimed Mabel, as the two girls trudged briskly in the wintry sunshine under the great bare elm trees in Kensington Gardens. "The Sisters won't let me stir out alone, unless I ride the whole way in a cab, and they have no time for pleasure walks; and I have no friend anywhere like you, Nell, and I think the Park looks lovely in winter, and you haven't admired my new hat a bit," and Mabel slipped her little gloved hand through Nell's arm, and squeezed it warmly.

"And I," said Nell, "have no girl-friend in the whole world, but you, and I think your hat is charming."

"And, Nell, we are always to be friends; and when we are married, it is not to make the least difference."

"Always friends, pet, and nothing is to make any difference—but as for marriage—something very sad has happened to me lately, Mab, and I wanted to tell you about it to-day."

"Oh, Nell, you have not quarrelled with Frank?"

"No, dear," said Nell, smiling in spite of herself at the mere idea of such a thing; "but this something, if it be true, will separate Frank and me, let our love be what it may."

"Oh, Nell, what have you heard?" said Mabel, lifting her soft eyes, full of wonder, to Nell's face.

"That, like you, Mabsie, I am some one else, and not myself at all." And Nell laughed in spite of herself.

"What do you mean, Nell? you know who your father was!"

"I thought I did, but I have just been told that no one knows who my father was."

"But why should that separate you and Frank?" said Mabel; "you cannot be his sister," she added naïvely, "for he has not lost one like Horace."

But Mabel, though nearly the same age as Nell, was such a very child in worldly matters, that Nell could give her no more definite explanation than this:

"Well, you see, dear, Frank belongs to high society, and is heir to a title; I will never let him marry a nameless girl who cannot say who her father was."

Mabel did not speak for a minute or two, but she held Nell's arm more lovingly, then she said, with unwonted seriousness:

"It is very sad and very strange that we should both have the same trouble."

"Let it make us the stronger friends," said Nell.

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Mabel brightening, "and besides, Nell, we are both so young, that I am quite sure everything will come right yet."

"I hope so, dear; and if not we both have our work; we must toil and grow famous."

"Yes," said Mabel, "so we will"; but her acquiescence was not very enthusiastic.

A minute or two later, Nell, glancing down at the girlish face beside her, saw it light up with a delicate glow, and following the direction of her eyes, she saw a gentleman in a very idle attitude on a bench beside the Round Pond in the act of rolling a cigarette. The next moment he rose and came toward them, and she saw that it was Horace; but Mabel had seen him first.

"Oh, you lazy sculptor," exclaimed Nell, "wasting the priceless daylight here, when you ought to be modelling Wiclifs in your studio."

"I came here to get inspiration from nature," was the unabashed reply of the sculptor; "don't you think it was a very sensible thing to do, Miss Fawcett?"

"Yes; I should think you would get ever so much inspiration about Wiclif out of the Round Pond," answered that demure little lady. "At any rate," she added, "you might ask Nell why *she* is wasting the priceless daylight."

"Excellent, Miss Fawcett. The biter fairly bit. Now, madame, exculpate yourself, if you please."

"I," said Nell, "am come to get inspiration from art. I am going to steal some notions from the figures on the Albert Memorial."

"If you do, I will denounce you to the committee. On the whole, I think I had better go with you."

"Now that is very shabby," said Nell. "You forget that we are rivals. You ought to stick to your pond. Do you think we should let him come, Mabel?"

"Perhaps it would be as well. Because, if you are bent on stealing ideas, Nell, you might get the benefit of some of his—all that are available, that is."

Mabel was radiantly happy that afternoon, as they all three went through the wintry lanes of the Park, the wind touching the girls' cheeks with a bright colour; neither Horace nor Nell had ever seen her so gay; and when, an hour later, Horace returned alone over the same ground, he was thinking what a bright perpetual sunbeam she would be in a man's studio.

"A sweet sister for a man—a sweet wife for some other man," he thought, and walked on a good while in the brownest of studies. Then, with unwonted energy, he exclaimed: "I'll go and see that guardian, and be assured of one thing or the other."

And in the evening sweet Mabel sat thinking in her pretty convent-room; and when the bell sounded for prayers, and she tripped down the long corridor, she assured herself, quite confidently, that "everything must come right some day, soon; life is so very beautiful."

CHAPTER XL.

"WHERE ARE YOUR PROOFS?"

IN his dingy lodgings, hard by the great Smithfield Market, Martin Clymo sat over a chill fire, and occupied himself with dismal thoughts.

Smithfield is not a cheerful neighbourhood at any time; it is a singularly cheerless one on a bleak day in winter. The remnants of a morning fog (it is a grand place for fog) hung over the streets; and from his window he caught a glimpse of the roof of the market, an inch deep in sleet. People with noses tending to blue passed and repassed along the reeking pavement, and the horses floundered through the heavy slough of the roads. Martin looked out dolefully on this doleful scene.

His more immediate surroundings were not much brighter. His window, it occurred to him, had not been washed during his tenancy, and was by this time rather opaque than transparent. The hearthrug on which his feet rested was dusted as often as his landlady had a dusting fit, which seized her at irregular intervals of two, three, or four months; and as often as he walked across it his boots provoked a miniature simoon. The ceiling was blackened with lamp-smoke. The wall-paper, which depicted the adventures of a pale-green sportsman after a covey of bright-green partridges, displayed gaps here and there, and an occasional damp patch of an uncertain hue. The French clock on the mantelpiece had long since grown disgusted with life in the vicinity of Smithfield; and, after a cynical course of intermittent ticking and uncertain striking, had entirely ceased to go.

Martin thought of the solid farmhouse in the fields above the sea, and tried in fancy to get a taste of the breeze that blew over the cliffs. But the farmhouse seemed farther away than ever; it belonged to days and scenes that he thought of with a dreary longing; it appeared, with all its associations, to have passed from him and his life for good and all. Why did he not go back? he asked himself, though he knew how vain the question was.

He could not go back and live again as he had lived before. The virtue had gone out of his life, and with it the motive. He was in his mistress's thraldom; he was under the spell of the woman whose happiness he had tried to wither. He loved Nell still with a morbid despairing love, and yet he was glad at what he had done.

Sometimes he had outbreaks of remorse, and then he would have given anything to undo his work, to be able to go to her and say that what he had told her was a lie (though he never for a moment doubted its truth); to feel a sad happiness in her delight; to taste the fruit of true penitence; and then to go home and begin life again, an honest man.

In his remorseful mood he used to argue that what he had done he had done for the best; that if Nell were really what his facts declared her to be, it were better that she should know it at once. He tried to hide from himself his own purpose in unfolding his scheme of revenge; to assure himself that whatever the consequences might have been, he had only played the part of the too-honest friend in discovering to Nell the fact of her dishonourable birth. Would it not have been a thousand times worse had the matter come to light at a later date, as it would almost certainly have done, say when she were married; and it were impossible then to undo the wrong she would unwittingly have done her husband?

But the still small voice would have its say, and it kept telling him that at the best he had acted a mean and selfish *rôle* from first to last.

He had calculated on terrifying Nell so completely as to get her in his power, when, he thought, she would have married him, rather than suffer the shame of an exposure.

This had been his plan; perhaps (he thought) if he had gone to work a little more cleverly he might have succeeded

with it. As it was, he had failed in the chief part of his design; but, when the remorseful fit had passed it was some comfort to think that he had at any rate put her out of the reach of the handsome parson; and on the whole he was much more glad than sorry at the course that matters had taken.

He waited to see what would follow. He had shot his bolt—what mischief would it work?

During these desolate days he had a visitor one evening. The landlady's mode of announcing visitors was simple but sufficient. Standing at the foot of the stairs, she put her hand to her mouth and bawled, "Summun t' see you, Mister Clymer." She then cautioned the visitor that, as the landlord had neglected to carry out the repairs he had promised, it would be advisable to bear lightly on the stair-rail; and requesting him to make use of the door-mat, disappeared by the back stairs.

Thus admonished, the visitor in question made the best of his way to the upper part of the house, and stopping outside the door, which appeared to answer most closely to the terms of the landlady's description, he knocked, and was bidden to enter.

The occupant of the room got up from his seat and looked at his visitor with a not too-kindly air, vouchsafing him no particular greeting.

"Mr. Clymo, I believe?" and Martin nodded in response. "My name is Lyne; and when I have said that I am engaged to be married to Miss Haffenden, I do not think I need further excuse my visit."

Martin made no answer, and the two men confronted one another from opposite sides of the room. They were taking mental notes of each other. Clymo thought the parson looked a man who might be well able to hold his own, and with whom it would be necessary to play a steady game. Lyne felt almost sorry for Clymo when he thought how much this man had lost in losing Nell. Then he remembered that Clymo was doing his best to make *him* a loser too, and thinking of the foul wrong he believed Clymo to have done her, his anger returned.

"You can guess what I have come about," said Lyne, briefly.

"Yes—I suppose I can; but you don't do much good in coming to me. You'd best sit down, though, if you're going to make a long talk about it," and he pointed to a chair in front of his own.

"I should prefer our talk to be as short as possible; and so I dare say would you," said Lyne; but he took the chair offered to him. "I am come," he went on, "to ask you to make good, if you can do so, a very serious statement which you have brought against Miss Haffenden. You must substantiate it thoroughly. I want your proofs."

"I've given proof enough. I've no more proof to give."

"You have not given a jot of proof," said Lyne.

"I've told Nell——"

"Do you mean Miss Haffenden?"

"Oh! if you like that best; though I knew her before ever you were heard of; I've told Miss Haffenden that she's base-born; and I've shown her how. You don't like it, I dare say; no more does N——no more does she. But if you don't believe it, that's your affair; and you'd best disprove it."

"In all this you give no proof. You have *not* 'shown her how.' You really do not seem to understand how grave is the accusation you have so lightly made. Don't you know, Mr. Clymo, that there is such a thing as libel? that libel is a thing of which the law takes cognizance, and for which it has rather weighty punishment? I must tell you that you stand clearly within the danger of the law in hazarding an unproven statement of this kind."

"Law be hanged! What do I care for law?" said Martin sullenly; but he looked a trifle uncomfortable. "The proofs are all right," he went on doggedly.

"Perhaps; but are they?"

"Your sweetheart thinks she's the daughter of Sarah Haffenden's brother. Well, she's wrong. Sarah Haffenden's brother had no children."

"How do you know that?"

"I've found it out."

"From whom?"

"From them that know."

"Come, come; that won't do—who are your informants?"

"Look here," said Clymo, bristling a little; "you think

I've made this tale up, don't you? You think I've put it together out of spite, knowing it's a lie. Well, I haven't. And now, if you want to know how I came by it, I'll tell you."

"That is precisely what I want to know."

"All right; you shall have it. To begin then. Awhile back, I chanced across an old fellow who first put me on the track that's led to what I've told you. He calls himself Garrick, and he belongs to one of these London theatres. He's a blamed old fool, and twaddles a sight about Shakespeare, the party that wrote Hamlet poisoning his mother, but he knew what he was saying when he let out about Sarah Haffenden. I met him in Covent Garden Market, where they charge you a guinea for a ninepenny nosegay. Well, this Garrick knew Sarah more than twenty years ago, when she lived in her native village in Essex. That was before she went north, you mind, and took the little place on our farm?"

"Is he certain," asked Lyne, "that the Sarah Haffenden who lived in Essex was the Sarah Haffenden who lived on your farm?"

"I am, if he isn't; but wait a bit; you'll get your proof directly. This village in Essex was Garrick's native village too. Sarah was one of these square women that no one had a word to say against; but a goodish-looking woman, and a lot of the men-fools were sweet on her. However, as I said, there wasn't a breath against her; but one day a queer thing happened. Sarah went away; was away a matter of a month or two; and then came back. But she didn't come as she went. She brought a baby with her—a girl. She gave it out as her brother's, who was a sailor, and had died at sea a little bit before. The mother, she said, had died within a week or two of the child's birth; and she was going to rear the orphan. All right. Sarah was a nice kind woman; what more natural than that she should want to rear her brother's orphan? Two or three months goes by, and a sailor whose mother lived in the village came home on leave. He had sailed in the same ship with Sarah's brother, and of course he hears about the orphan that Sarah was so kindly providing for. 'There's something wrong here,' says he, 'my shipmate never had a child; I knew him before and after he was married.' Well, Sarah denied it, as she was bound to do;

but somehow or other she didn't seem to care about facing it out. Rum stories got about; the neighbours fell away; things got hotter; and one fine day Sarah packed up her things and shifted. She went as far as she could get; she went clean north, and settled on our farm. The child—that was Miss Haffenden, you know—went with her, of course; and grew up as her niece. But she wasn't Sarah's niece, Mr. Lyne; she was Sarah's daughter."

"Ah! That I think is the point to be proved. How do you prove that?" said Lyne.

"Prove it? Why, it looks to me as if it proved itself. Besides, they all knew it in Sarah's village."

"Who knew it?"

"The neighbours—all of 'em."

"Indeed? *How* did they know it?"

"Come now, Mr. Parson; them that won't see a thing, won't. But you can't persuade me that you're not sharp enough to smell out this, unless you're dead bent on stopping up your nose. What's the reasonable thing, and, as far as that goes, the only thing for folks to believe in a case like this? If Sarah's story was truth, she could have proved it straight off. When a child's born, the birth is registered; and if you want it, you can get a certificate too. Sarah said the child was her brother's; the sailor chap that knew him said it wasn't. What had Sarah to do but show the certificate of birth? She didn't do it; and what was worse, she cut the village in less than a month, got as far away from it as she could, and never went near it again. That's all I've got to say, and you can set the law on me as soon as you like."

Lyne, unwilling as he was, saw that the case was a stronger one than he had at first supposed. That it was not a pure fabrication was clear at any rate; on the other hand, the evidence was no more than presumptive.

He said:

"I must of course see this man Garrick."

"Yes, and welcome," replied Clymo. "Maybe you think there isn't a man Garrick. Maybe you think I'm Garrick myself. Well, you can see him here in this room; and I'll be here too, if that'll satisfy you. Or p'r'aps you'd like to see him at home best. I'll write down the place where he lives, and you can go there. If he isn't at home

you'll find him at his doctor's close by. He suffers from a weight on his chest, poor man, and goes to the nearest public to get it lightened at thrippence the glass. There's his address."

"Thank you," said Lyne. "I should only like to say in reply to what you have told me, that your case is not by any means so complete as you suppose."

"P'r'aps it is, and p'r'aps it isn't; but I shouldn't wonder if it would be a harder job than you fancy to weaken it," answered Clymo; and the two men parted.

CHAPTER XLI.

MR. MEADOWSWEET COMES TO TOWN.

"I SHALL be away two Sundays. Mr. Rawson will be here in my place. Treat him, if it be possible, better than you do me. Where are my Sunday spectacles? Never mind that button; I'll put it in my pocket, and Nell shall sew it on to-morrow. Don't let the fire out in the greenhouse. The wine for Communion is up there behind 'Barnes on Isaiah.' Dust the pictures, but, as you value your life, let the china alone. My sermon-case? No; do you think I am going to waste my philosophy in a London pulpit? I am going to make holiday, I tell you. Now I am off. Lock the fowl-yard every night. God bless you."

And with these parting injunctions to his housekeeper, Mr. Meadowsweet put his bag over his shoulder, and took his way to the railway station, where he purchased a third-class ticket to London.

On the evening of this day Nell was plunged in the depths of despair regarding Wiclif, by reason of some terrific words from Mr. Bledsoe.

"Please, Mr. Bledsoe, tell me very candidly what chance of success you think I have in this competition," she had said to him in the afternoon; and Mr. Bledsoe's reply had been:

"If you can manage his nose with forbearance, if you can contrive to introduce an admirable symmetry and a pleasing flow of outline where it is entirely impossible that you should do so, and can diffuse over all a mitigating breath of gracefulness such as I myself can scarcely imagine, you may succeed in producing a work which

a few choice spirits would pronounce to be not wholly meretricious."

"But I scarcely think I shall be able to do all that, Mr. Bledsoe," faltered Nell.

"I scarcely think you will," was the inexorable response.

So the following morning she went to the reading-room of the British Museum, there to search and find out for herself what manner of man the Reformer really was.

She was seated in a snug corner of the room, just beneath the clock, half buried in an enormous pile of books; and the distinguished young attendant, who has a Roman nose and his hair parted in the middle, was hovering, angel-like, around her, when a thunderous exclamation close at her ear made her jump in her seat, and provoked an angry growl from several studious readers.

"May the girdle of the Baptist choke me if she isn't sitting in the very seat I always used!"

Nell sprang up and took the speaker by the hands, her face beaming with delight.

"Oh! it is—it *is* you, dear Mr. Meadowsweet. How good the sight of you is to me! But come," she whispered, "let us go outside; they won't allow us to talk in here."

And with her hand on his sleeve she brought him out of the room and through the corridor and across the hall, and on to the terrace at the top of the steps. The budding librarian with the Roman nose looked after her and sighed.

"Now," she said, "let me see you."

The old Vicar stretched himself to his fullest inches—he stood six feet one in his boots—and submitted himself to inspection.

"You look perfectly splendid!"

The Vicar pulled up his collar, but coughed in a deprecating way.

"But there is a button off your coat!"

Without a word the Vicar produced the missing button and handed it to Nell, who put it in her pocket.

"Oh! I am so glad, you can't think *how* glad, to see you. You bring all the old happy days back again. I smell the sea and the fields in your dear old rusty coat. And you have really come because I wrote that letter to you? How kind of you; and how Frank will thank you!"

"There, there, don't make so much of it; I promise you I didn't want much of an excuse to come and look at you again. But face about; it's your turn for inspection now. Blessed Eve! Here's dressmaker's work for you!"

"There isn't a bit of dressmaker's work in it; I made it all myself. The style is Parisian."

"To be sure it is; is not Paris the eye of Europe? But, Nell, how you have grown—I mean, how you have expanded—well, you know what I mean; you are changed, transformed. For the better, I think; yes, quite for the better. You were a girl when you left me a few months ago; you're a woman now; paler certainly, but you can't grow roses in a chimney; and you're not as doughy as most of the women I've seen in the last four-and-twenty hours."

"That's a compliment to my good habits. I don't live in the country now, but I keep up my country practices as far as I can. You know it was from you that I first learned the rules of good living. But now you must talk about yourself. Think of all you have to tell me!"

"Yes, but that can wait. There are graver matters. This that you have brought me up about, in the first place. How can I help you, Nell?"

"I think we will not talk about that just now," she answered. "The first hour I am with you I want to forget it. But I'll tell you what you shall do; come back into the reading-room, and you shall help me with my work."

"Work? what are ye working at here? Why aren't you in your studio?"

"Oh! I forgot. I haven't told you about Wiclif. Well, there's to be a public competition for a statue of Wiclif, and Mr. Harte has said that I am to go in for it. Of course, I haven't the smallest chance, because Horace is going in, too; but I mean to send in a model, just to accustom myself to being rejected; and I'm getting my materials here."

"Good. Wiclif? A splendid subject! I could almost make a statue of John Wiclif myself."

"I am delighted to hear you say so. Mr. Bledsoe has been putting me quite out of conceit with it by saying that Wiclif is altogether an unsuitable subject for a statue."

"Bledsoe! Who's Bledsoe?"

"Don't you know Mr. Bledsoe? He is the Great Art Critic. But he says Wiclif was all nose."

"Well, hang him for a duffer! So much for Bledsoe! Now, then, I'll show you the sort of man that Wiclif was on the day he appeared before the Convocation of Canterbury at St. Paul's, February 19th, 1377. Where's Lechler? Why, you haven't got Lechler. What does that youth, with the nose, who's been piling up all these books for you, mean by not fetching out the best biographer of them all? Write a ticket for Lechler. Ah! here it comes. This is evidently a most susceptible youth. If it were me he was attending on I should have had to wait fifty minutes; he has fetched it for you in fifteen. Now listen to Lechler." And the Vicar turned up the following passage without hesitation, and read it to Nell in an animated whisper:

"'A tall thin figure, covered with a long light gown of black colour, with a girdle about his body; the head adorned with a full flowing beard, exhibiting features keen and sharply cut; the eye clear and penetrating; the lips firmly closed in token of resolution—the whole man wearing an aspect of lofty earnestness, and replete with dignity and character.'"

"Now, what do you say to that? Is he a fit subject for sculpture, or is he not?"

"A grand subject! As fine a subject as could be wished."

"That's my own opinion. Now, we shall hunt up portraits and costumes; and don't forget to give the old Doctor Evangelicus, as they called him at Oxford, his staff. Bledsoe, eh? Ho, ho!"

Book after book did the Vicar cause that gentle youth to bring forth, and his enthusiasm for the subject increased with the arrival of each succeeding volume.

At length he exclaimed:

"I'll tell you what it is, Nell; one statue isn't enough for this; you can't do justice to the subject with a single figure. If I were you I'd give them the entire Reformation in a bas-relief!"

At the which Nell turned pale, and suggested an adjournment for luncheon.

After this the Vicar declared that he must be taken at once to the studio that he might see Nell at work. So off they went, and the Vicar was introduced to Harte and

Mrs. Harte, with whom he was delighted. They in their turn listened with immense interest while he talked to them about Nell, and told them of the far-away beginnings of her artistic career, even of his earliest discovery of her moulding clay cherubs on a damp tombstone in his churchyard.

Then Nell took him and showed him the glories of the studio, and deep was his delight in Harte's beautiful work. With his hands thrust far into the pockets of his long coat he went with great strides about the room, stopping every now and then before some figure or bust with a long-drawn sigh of enjoyment, sometimes with a positive shout of admiration.

His indignation was infinite when he learned that one of the gems of the collection—a little marble figure of Icarus, just preparing to try his wings in a first flight sky-ward—had stood for twenty years in the studio without ever finding a purchaser.

"In mediæval Florence," exclaimed the Vicar, with glowing eyes, "they would have carried this in triumph through the streets!"

"But come," he said presently to Nell, "take me to your own shop. I must see what *you* have been doing all this while."

Nell of course had not a great deal to show; but Mr. Meadowsweet expressed himself much pleased with the portrait of Mabel, on which she was then working.

"A sweet girl face," said the Vicar, "and rather learnedly modelled, I declare."

He made her put on her apron and do some work on the bust, while he sat by and watched, talking all the while in sudden half-formed ejaculatory sentences.

"A rare art! a delicious life! You artists that work with ease and freedom, and watch day by day the beauty that grows under your hands, are the only ones that truly live; and yours, my Nell, is of all the arts the most fastidious. What is sculpture if not absolutely eclectic? You go about and abstract typical beauty out of the infinite variety that lies about you—is it not so? You must copy Nature more closely and realistically than the painter, and yet you shall tend away toward the perfecting of a complete and ideal beauty such as Nature herself does not exhibit in any one example. This is not my own; I have been

reading and bottling it up for you at home. And what an inheritance is yours! Think of the great ones you descend from, with whose spirits you claim affinity. I'll be bound the ghosts of Phidias and Myron and Michel Angelo and Flaxman, and all the rest of them, step down here in quite a friendly way at least a dozen times a week. Let the other world wag on—it is brutish and sensual, and infinitely absurd. You are the ones that know the money-grubbers for supreme fools, and are persuaded that all politicians are fit for nothing but to be choked with their own fatuous drivel. The 'purity and truth of beauty' are your only concern: out of marble, which is as little like flesh as anything in the world, you can make men and women in the likenesses of gods. What more would you have?"

"Go on, please, Mr. Meadowsweet, it is beautiful; I am listening to every word."

"You are not, but I forgive you; for while I have been jabbering you have been lost in the pleasure of your work, and I enjoy the look on your face at such a time. What noisy person is that outside?"

"I think—yes, it is Mr. Bledsoe. Would you not like to be introduced to him?"

"The man Bledsoe? Where is my walking-stick? Let me at him!"

But happily for the safe outcome of this meeting of Greek with Greek, Mr. Bledsoe was that afternoon in an extraordinarily genial mood.

And here let me say that this unique specimen of a dictator in matters artistic was of a grievously dyspeptic habit, and that his judgments on art and artists took their tone chiefly from the condition of his stomach. When Mr. Bledsoe's stomach flourished, he foresaw the immediate advent of a new golden age of English art; when it languished, he alternately groaned over and fulminated against the whole artistic institution.

This afternoon he was convinced that Wiclif was one of the choicest subjects that the chisel of a sculptor could desire, that the institution of the competition reflected the highest honour on the ancient Corporation of London, and that Nell in entering it showed a proper spirit of ambition, which deserved to be rewarded with a due measure of success.

He took advantage of the presence of a stranger to launch out into a general discourse on the character, tendency, and scope of modern sculpture, compared it with the achievements of antiquity, and observed that if Greece had had her day, it had after all been a brief one, that there never had been but one really supreme period of art in that country, and that in the growing technical skill observable amongst the young artists of the present day there was promise of exceeding great things to come.

In the course of his observations he took up a small wooden figure of a satyr—one of Harte's early performances—and expatiated on the imaginative beauty which it displayed.

"It is very clever, very clever indeed, and quite wonderful as regards its technique, but I should not call it beautiful," remarked the Vicar.

Contradiction, even in the mildest form, was the thing that Mr. Bledsoe could not brook; the candid ones amongst his friends used to say that it made an idiot of him at once.

"Sir," he replied, "this little thing is beautiful; it is instinct with the supreme and unapproachable beauty of absolute and irretrievable ugliness."

Nothing but Nell's persistent plucking at his sleeve restrained the Vicar from an outburst, but he contented himself with murmuring something about the unsatisfactory character of a paradoxical argument.

"Sir," answered Mr. Bledsoe, "I invariably and at all times speak in paradox. What is the perfection of beauty but the absence of deformity? and in the perfection of deformity is there not a beauty after its kind? There is. Beauty is infinite. Let the cranium be capacious in the front, and the forehead swelling, and I do not care twopence about regularity of feature. You have the seductive eye, the commanding nostril, the jaw of strength, and the dimple of innocence and witchery. There is a beauty of the young and of the old. Have I a dimple? No. Is it probable that I ever had a dimple? It is highly probable. What is a dimple? It is the result of the muscles which are introduced in the angle of the mouth operating on the soft integument of infancy and youth. There is a beauty of the Hottentot and of the Hippopotamus. Is there anything further to be said on the subject?"

"Nothing!" answered Harte, with alacrity.

"Or if there be," added his wife, "we can discuss it over a cup of tea. Mr. Meadowsweet, I scarcely dare ask whether you drink tea at such an hour as this?"

"I thank you," replied the Vicar. "I do not. But I shall take leave to come in again another day."

"Well," said Nell, with an unsuppressed twinkle of the eye as she led him through the cloisters, "what do you think of Mr. Bledsoe?"

"I think," answered the Vicar slowly, "that there is a beauty of the Hottentot and of the Hippopotamus, and that I shall never forgive myself for not plucking out his beard by the roots."

In the evening they were together in Nell's room, and then she poured out her heart to him, and told him all her sorrow. He listened with softened face, but every now and then his indignation against Martin broke out in quick inarticulate exclamations, and he said: "No! No! No!" with quite a fierce emphasis at every reference of Nell's to the charge against Sarah.

"It is a strange story," he said, when she had finished; "and for you, my Nell, a terrible one; but I wholly and completely disbelieve it. Sarah Haffenden was no such woman as that. That Clymo has forged the story I do not believe. I have known him from a child. There are some bad points in him, and this mad jealousy of his has brought them out, and he has been quick to believe this tale, seeing in it a means of harming you. He has not invented it, I am certain; but I give no more credence to it on that account. And once more, I emphatically repudiate the charge against Sarah. It has not sprung in Martin's brain, but it is a calumny for all that."

"That is what I have tried to persuade myself; not for my own sake only, but because it is dreadful to me to put what seems so foul a wrong upon her memory. But what am I to believe, Mr. Meadowsweet? I have no papers, not a document of any kind with which to answer the charge."

"Therein of course lies the sole strength of the case against you. But for the present I would have you believe nothing at all. Proof! proof! proof! We must have absolute proof before we believe a word of it."

"And you—can you help me to any proof?"

His face fell; a look that was almost abashed came over it, and his voice was unsteady as he replied:

"I cannot. Ah! you are disappointed, Nell—poor Nell. An old wicked fool I was to raise your hopes by coming up at all! But I thought 'she will like to see me, if she be in trouble, though I can do nothing;' and I—well, nothing could keep me away when I had that letter of yours."

"You dear friend—you know how glad I am that you came. But—but do you not know anything at all, Mr. Meadowsweet?"

"It seems strange that I should not," he answered, "I who was so intimate with her; but in that very fact there is fresh confirmation to me of my belief that the whole story is false. Stay, though, something occurs to my mind. You remember that she was in a nervous and, as we thought, a fanciful state a few days before her death. I recollect now that on one of those days she said something about a communication of some sort that she wanted to make to me. I thought the body referred to her will, maybe, and put her off with one of my foolish jests. She brought this up again, not two days, as I think, before she died; and said then that it was not about her will that she wanted to speak, but about you. I still thought little of it, and within two days from that she was dead, never having told it to me."

"The chance that will never come again was lost then," said Nell, with a pale cheek and fallen look.

"Do not say that; nothing is lost yet. I will never believe but that such a matter as this is capable of being proved to the very hilt. Prove it, we will; and to your honour, Nell. And until it is proved your position is unchanged; you are still the Nell that we have always believed you to be."

But she made a half gesture of despair, and did not seem to gather much comfort from his words.

"Did she never speak to you about her brother, my—my father?" Nell asked presently.

"She mentioned him once, by chance. It was quite casual, but I mean to tell it to Lyne, for it may help him slightly when he comes to search for proofs. She spoke once of having been in a certain water-side parish in London. I, supposing that she had never quitted the

country, asked how she came to visit London, and such an out-of-the-way quarter of it as that. She answered that her brother's wife was there in lodgings, and that she attended her during her last illness, which occurred within a very short time after her husband's death at sea. That was all."

"What was the name of the water-side parish?" asked Nell.

"I have been beating my brain the last two days, but cannot think of it. But the water-side parishes are not so numerous, I take it, that it will be impossible to search the church records of them all."

"I must tell Frank of this at once," said Nell.

"Let me see him to-morrow," said the Vicar.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SEARCH BEGUN.

"WAGE-SLAVES, do you call them?"

The Vicar and Lyne were closeted in Frank's study on the morning after the conversation just reported. Mr. Meadowsweet had plunged, directly on entering the room, into stormy and quite irrelevant talk about capital and labour—the outcome of his thoughts as he journeyed through the East on the knife-board of an omnibus.

"It is a new name they have got," replied Lyne, "and it conveys a not unfaithful idea of their condition."

"The root of the mischief I take to be the domination of capital," said the Vicar.

"It is one of the principal roots," answered Lyne. "In the wake of that follow many evils. Workmen, both good and bad, are every day, and in greater and greater numbers, becoming the bondmen of the few who hold the money-bags. Those who want to keep alive the system as it is gammon them with talk about their independence and the rights of labour. They have no independence; and they have only the right to agitate, which, thank God! they are just beginning to use. Independent! What is their independence? There never was a time when the uncertainty of employment for the individual labourer was greater than it is at present. When 'bad times' come, which generally means that the employer will not sacrifice a little bit of profit to keep his workmen in bread and cheese, out into the street they are turned by hundreds. New mechanical inventions force skilled workmen out of their own grooves to compete with the unskilled for

starvation wages. When age stiffens the back and cramps the fingers, away goes the old servant at a week's notice to make room for younger blood. Every decade there comes a fresh industrial crisis, and each succeeding one is sharper and lasts longer than the preceding, and sends a new regiment of men able and willing to work into the highways, the workhouses, or the prisons. The demands of capital grow with its increasing strength, and the state of the employed goes from bad to worse."

"But for all this, do you blame capital?"

"I blame capital for almost every evil that arises out of, or is connected with, the present industrial system. I blame it because, having won for itself a position of extraordinary advantage—won it not only by industry and ingenuity, but by grasping here and cutting down there; by giving starvation wages in good times, and worse than that in bad times—it has neglected almost every duty which its position entails. The mere animal strength to work is all that it values, and that strength it uses ruthlessly. The creatures that work for it are its tools; when it has broken or worn them down it clears them out of the way. Talk of this kind is called the cant of the professional agitator, and you are met with answers of bonuses given in this house, of the men sharing profits in another, and of a number of petty sentimental aids which the masters render elsewhere. But these things are on the surface; they do not affect the root of the matter, which is that the workmen are underpaid everywhere, the skilled and the unskilled alike, and that they have no kind of security in their employment."

"And on these facts you base your demands for the remaking of society?" said the Vicar. "Well, they are strong facts; but we are approaching ticklish ground, which my old feet are rather afraid of. On what I may call the subjective side of me I am a sort of socialist myself; but if I were to go much further into it I should take to preaching socialism in the pulpit, and then they would kick me out of it; so, as I am no longer young enough to care about seeking fresh pastures, I eschew these new and spicy matters, and cleave to those which are musty and safe. This is base, but prudent."

"And after all," put in Lyne, "this is not what we are met to talk about. I have much to thank you for in your kindness in coming up, for I know the object of your visit."

"You had better wait to thank me until you have learned the extent of my ability to serve you. The fact is, I am here to say, though I say it with shame, that I can do next to nothing."

"It's not so bad as that," said Lyne. "I have a letter from Nell this morning, written, I imagine, after you left her last night, in which she says that you learned from Sarah Haffenden the locality her brother's wife was living in at the time of her death. If that is so, it will be a useful bit of information, for it will show me at once in what direction to look for the written proofs that are wanted."

"The wife of Sarah Haffenden's brother—whom we shall continue to regard as Nell's mother—died," answered the Vicar, "in a water-side parish in London. That is to say, she must have died within a short distance of where we are now."

"You don't know the name of the parish?"

"I can't remember it for the life of me."

"That's no great matter. I shall search till I have found it. Do you think it probable that she and her husband were married there?"

"I think it quite likely. The marriage took place, I believe, almost immediately before Haffenden went on one of his voyages. He does not seem to have been married in his native village, and that being so, it is as likely as not that he selected the parish nearest to where his ship was lying in dock."

"And Nell—she was in all likelihood born in the same parish?"

"I should say so, for the wife appears to have clung to the spot near which her husband would first set foot on shore when he came into port again."

"Good; I have now a definite point from which to start, and I shall commence accordingly."

"There is a suggestion I am going to make," said the Vicar, "which does not appear to have occurred to any one

at present, though it strikes me as a fairly plausible one. It is that Nell may still be the child of Sarah Haffenden, and the birth an honest one for all that."

"I do not understand you," said Lyne.

"I see that you don't. My meaning is this; that Sarah might have been secretly married. What do you say to that?"

"It is a suggestion worth testing; but there are one or two presumptions against it. There is no visible reason, supposing your hypothesis to be the true one, why Sarah Haffenden should have persisted in a false story to the end of her life, which (whenever and wherever suspicion arose) must have been to her child's injury as well as to her own. She must have looked to the future, and recollected the harm she was doing to the child in deliberately keeping her in ignorance of her true birth."

"There may have been strong reasons of which we know nothing at present; such things have happened," said the Vicar.

"I can't imagine any reasons strong enough," replied Lyne, "for maintaining to the last such a grave falsehood as this would have been. She might have been tongue-tied through some cause or other as long as she was amongst her own people; but that she should have gone to the grave in silence seems to me impossible."

"Her death was a very sudden one; she went to bed in seeming health one night, and was found dead upon her pillow in the morning. That she seems to have had a confession of some sort, which she was anxious to make to me, I have already told Nell. My own belief is that she would have unburdened her mind of some mystery had she lived a week longer. At any rate, I think my suggestion is worth keeping in mind."

"Well, yes; it is worth that, I think, and I shan't lose sight of it. The two inquiries may be pursued almost along the same lines."

"Have you spoken with Clymo's informant yet?"

"With Garrick? No; I have appointed to see him to-morrow."

"And I suppose you will go down to Sarah's village—somewhere in Essex, I think it was?"

"Yes; I shall go there next."

"You have everything in train, I see."

"You can imagine that I am not in a mood to let the grass grow under my feet. I cannot lose Nell like this. I have heard her own lips say that she loves me; I can hear her say it now. I tell you that it will not be an easy thing to take her from me."

"I like you!" said the Vicar, stretching out his old sinewy hand to Frank, who grasped it warmly in return.

On the morning after this Frank was tramping through the slush of Drury Lane in search of Garrick's lodgings. He did not expect to learn much more from him than he had learned from Clymo; his main object in going was to be assured that Garrick's story, so far as Garrick's own knowledge went, was a true one. His mind was not yet quite at ease regarding his first suspicions, that the whole matter was a conspiracy.

The theatrical artist rented a room over the shop of a small costumier. In the window were coloured portraits of divers heroes and heroines of tragedy, comedy, and ballet, together with an assortment of parti-coloured garments of all descriptions, and stage weapons and stage jewellery, which no light but that of the stage lamps should ever be suffered to shine upon.

To reach Mr. Garrick's apartments you entered by a side-door, and presently found yourself plunged in Tartarean obscurity. You mounted a staircase as steep as Jacob's ladder. You went up and up and up until the stairs came to an abrupt termination at a small bare landing within a few feet of a sloping roof.

Directly opposite was a door, innocent of paint or varnish, with cracks in the panels wide enough for an archer to shoot through. Beyond this was the room in which the old super lived and had his being—a fair-sized room, with a queer variety of battered and dusty furniture, and an alcove curtained off at the far end, where, when he returned from the theatre at an uncertain hour betwixt night and morning, sleep knit up the ravelled sleeve of Mr. Garrick's care. There were reminders of his calling in the shape of faded prints of bygone actors of note — Garrick as Richard III., Kemble as Coriolanus, Kean as Shylock, and Macready as Werner, in an old scratch wig, and a wide felt hat with plumes.

In such a poor and shabby chamber as this many a great player has begun his stage career, some have never passed beyond its like, and Garrick was one of these. His star could not be said to have declined, for it had never risen. His historic name seemed perpetually to mock his low estate.

The spectacle of the super who has grown old in this the lowest walk of his profession is a strange and rather a sad one. An inarticulate pathos cnwraps him. He is the Helot of the stage. He has neither rank, authority, nor honour; the stage-manager swears at him; the prompter takes small account of him; the very call-boy esteems him lightly. He has no individual existence; he moves in a crowd of his fellow supers; he is a piece of the mechanism of the play. The audience know him not, for one super differs not from another super in obscurity. His name does not figure in the bill; he is set down with freezing generality as "soldiers," "peasants," "senators," "citizens," "foresters," "dwarfs," "giants," "uncouth creatures," "murderers," "and other attendants." He touches, presumably, the lowest plane when he is cast for the *rôle* of beast, bird, or fish, in a pantomime; or, perhaps, there is a lower depth than this, when he forms part only of some huge creature, his legs being the sole portion of him which the author has deigned to utilise. Certainly the children who shouted with delight over the famous "elephant" scene in the Covent Garden pantomime of that year, would have stared open-eyed had they been admitted behind the scenes when the dismemberment of that huge beast took place, and there emerged tired and panting from the hinder end of him a little old man with long gray hair and hazel eyes. This was the person whom Lyne had come to visit.

Garrick had been warned by Martin that he was to receive a call from a parson who was interested in the Haffenden reminiscences, so he was not unprepared for the visit.

"Come in, sir," said Garrick, "and take a seat, and let us talk familiarly. Why should we not? Tut! Reverend sir, your calling and mine are not so far removed. You learn a piece and speak it, so do we."

As this was evidently intended for a conciliatory opening,

Lyne accepted the speech in that spirit, and took the chair which Mr. Garrick had dusted for him with the scratch wig.

He explained the object of his visit, and the old man seemed considerably impressed.

"I have made mischief by letting my tongue stray; let me be punished," said he. "Where the offence is, let the axe fall. It occurred in a light and babbling way, sir. I flung out a little crumb upon the waters of gossip, and it has returned to me. I am older than I was when I played First Murderer to Macready's Macbeth, and when the age is in, as Dogberry says, the wit is out. Since Compton died, there is no man living can play Dogberry. Let me have judgment."

"I didn't come to talk of judgment or of punishment, Mr. Garrick," answered Frank pleasantly, "and I am quite ready to believe that what you said was, as you admit, lightly spoken. It has led to serious trouble, as I have shown you; but that is neither here nor there. I came to you principally to be certain that all you told Mr. Clymo you told in good faith—I mean that, to the best of your knowledge, it was a statement of fact."

"I always stuck to it with Mr. Clymo that the child was an honest child; he told you that?"

"No; he said nothing of that."

"Ah! he shouldn't have kept that in."

"But have you any ground for your belief? For your story seems, on the face of it, to point to a different conclusion."

"I have no ground, sir, except that I knew Sarah pretty well, and that she wasn't one of these gamesome trolloping things which make nothing of a lapse from the path of——"

"But you have no proof?"

"No, sir, none but that."

"All that you said, however, about Sarah's bringing the child to the village, about the suspicions which arose there, and about her leaving it and taking the child with her, all this, I suppose, is known to you?"

"It is all part and parcel of my experience. I've known it all. I am, you see, reverend sir, one of these gossiping old baggages that must be talking, for a variety of reasons. Sometimes because I've looked a little longer than my

custom is into the pewter; sometimes because I'm in company where a dash of humour and a pretty taste in anecdotes are appreciated; sometimes, again, because a word that's dropped sharpens my memory of old dead things, and then there's no putting a stopper on me anyhow. Now Mr. Clymo, you see, when he let fall the name of Haffenden, did, as it were, jog the thinking part of me, and by-and-by out comes this miserable story of Sarah and the infant, the mewling and the puking——"

"And you told it to him just as you remembered it, Mr. Garrick, without additions or——"

"Sir, you must give me leave a moment. I have acted in the company of William Charles Macready, and that great man was once pleased to say in my hearing that I was as villainous a First Murderer as he in his greatness could wish to have. Sir, it's as if the archbishop were to walk into the vestry, after the service, and ask you to uncork the sherry wine that he might drink to your excellent sermon. Could you ever again preach one of these milk-and-water world-without-end discourses after that? No more could I descend to a base action or a lying tale after words of praise received from that great man! My honour is a jewel. I would not part with it for a wilderness of monkeys. Eh? Am I a little out there? The lines don't run in my memory as they used to do. I say I have spoken the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Thank you. If I seem to press you a little hard upon that point, you must forgive me, and set it down to the very deep interest that I have in getting to the bottom of this mystery. I have only now to ask you for the name of the village in which Sarah Haffenden lived at the time you knew her?"

"She lived at that time, sir, in Lechford in Essex; her native village and mine. You'll find some old ones there will be glad to talk to you of this. A gossiping set, and evil-tongued. They were bitter upon Sarah. But, trust me, sir, if what you want to prove is the honest birth of that babe, you'll prove it some day."

"That is my object," answered Lyne. "And it will go very hard with me but I shall succeed. There is just one thing I should like to ask you about. Was it ever suggested, as far as you know, that the child which was alleged to be

Sarah Haffenden's might have been the result of a secret marriage on her part?"

"They never said anything so charitable as that. No, I never heard a breath of that."

"What do you think of the suggestion yourself, Mr. Garrick?"

"I think, sir, that if Sarah was ever married secretly, it must have been very secretly indeed," replied the old man. "But," he added, "go to Lechford; leave no corner unsearched. If I were not professionally engaged at our national theatre I'd go with you myself. But go alone, and grace be with you. Stand not upon the order of your going, reverend sir, but go."

"As decent a specimen of the Church as I've seen," said the old super to himself when Lyne was gone. "Ah! there's not scope enough in the Establishment for a man with a figure like that. The sort of man you wouldn't mind putting yourself out about to get him an order for the pit."

"He speaks truth," thought Lyne. "There's no plot in it."

The same night he went down to Lechford in Essex.

CHAPTER XLIII.

HORACE BECOMES VERY MUCH IN EARNEST.

"Is it good or not good for man to dwell alone? Amongst the great ones of the earth, in what ratio do the married stand to the unmarried? Is the Apostle Paul a safe matrimonial guide? Is it profitable any longer to remember that Socrates had Xantippe to wife, and that the wives of Shakespeare and Milton are reported to have thought but poorly of their genius? Is Plato's opinion on this subject distinctly superior to Pantagruel's, and is the judgment of Bacon to be regarded as final? What quantity of respectable facts might be adduced to show that artists (and sculptors especially) stand in greater need than others of the sons of men of the chastening, the soothing, the elevating, the inspiriting, the——"

"Good morning, Horace! What are you lecturing on, and what has become of the audience?"

"I am engaged, my flippant lady, in unfolding for my own edification a subject of unparalleled importance and complexity. I was not aware that I had a listener."

"Which means that you don't want one, and that I had better retire."

"No; on second thoughts, I believe you may stay where you are. You may be able to assist me. Where had I got to?"

"You were asking yourself in a very stupid and round-about way whether you ought not to get married."

"I had not got so far as that, but I don't deny that I might have reached such a question in due time."

"In due time! Horace, you procrastinating boy, I

haven't any patience with you. I thought you had made up your mind long ago."

"You see, Nell, I was thrown off the line entirely a while back."

"Nonsense. I think that notion of yours is the most absurd I ever heard. If I were you, I would go and bring Mabel here at once."

"You strike me dumb with horror! How could I do that after the difficulty that has been raised?"

"Now just listen to me, Horace. This 'difficulty' is entirely of your own making; and it is one that no one in the world but you would ever have thought of raising. To me, it has always seemed an absurdity; but since you have raised it yourself I am willing to grant its existence. Very well; but *you* have made it, and it is for you to dispose of it. You owe this to Mabel even more than to yourself, for you have placed her in the most ridiculous position that any girl ever stood in. Now, if you don't see the course you ought immediately to take, I give you up entirely."

"What time does the Continental train leave?" was Horace's reply.

"I don't know, but we can soon find that out. Send the boy for a Bradshaw. Now, bring out the things you will want for a three days' absence, and a bag, and I'll pack them for you."

"All this was the very thing I should have decided on, if you had come in ten minutes later, you know," said Horace, as he set about meekly and with alacrity to obey Nell's injunctions.

"I am glad to hear it; but it would have taken you at least a week to pack your bag. Now, don't bring out your whole wardrobe; you must be back in three days."

"Here comes Bradshaw. Ah! the mail starts at about eight-thirty. It is now half-past ten. By Jove, Nell, only ten hours to get from here to the railway station, and it's two miles and a half at the very least! Mercury with the winged feet, O help us!"

"It's all very well to be funny, Master Horace; but if I were not here to help you, you wouldn't find the time at all too long. There, you had better give me your dress-coat; he *might* ask you to dine with him."

"He is more likely to ask me to bring a friend to break-

fast at five o'clock in the morning; breakfast to be followed by an adjournment to the back garden; I to have the choice of weapons."

"You need not concern yourself with that contingency. He is a man of science, and certainly will not take the trouble to get up at five in the morning to shoot you. What are you getting out that opera hat for? I shan't pack that."

"Shan't I go somewhere near Paris?" asked Horace mildly.

"To reach a town in Normandy! Where's your geography? No, that won't do at all, my friend. You will go as straight as you can to Caen, and from there to Bayeux. See, instead of the opera hat I will pack your prayer-book, and you can study the marriage service to keep off *mal de mer*. Now, sit on the bag, and let me lock it."

"You have arranged everything so nicely, Nell, that it only remains for you to drive me to the station, and give me in charge of the guard."

"Oh, I am going to do that. You don't suppose I shall let you out of my sight until I have seen the carriage door locked on you."

"You are a very Napoleon, Nell; your multitudinous energy appals me. There is but one trifling detail I can think of that yet remains to be settled. I have not the least idea where the gentleman lives whose castle, or châlet, I am going to take by storm."

"Well, now you mention it," said Nell, "I'm not quite sure of the exact address myself. I think it is just outside Bayeux—but that, as you say, is mere detail. I shall bring you full directions this evening. Till then, good-bye."

And Nell gathered up her gloves and vanished. Horace relapsed into a chair, and lit a cigarette, and went on at once with his matrimonial soliloquy, at the point where it had met with interruption :—"the chastening, the soothing, the elevating, the inspiriting, the—no, hang it! I'd better not go on with this, or I shall end by discovering a good reason for waiting a little longer, and Nell will find me unpacking when she arrives with the cab. Am I going on a fool's errand? Probably. Am I the first fellow who has gone on a fool's errand? Not by many thousands. Courage,

then. But let me think over my mission. What am I going to do when I discover and reach this gentleman's abode? I do not know. But I had better, I suppose, tell him the story in full.

"I shall explain the circumstances under which I came to know, esteem, and love the lady, his ward; the strange difficulty which presented itself to me at this crisis; the impossibility of removing that difficulty except with his assistance; and shall end by threatening him with the horrors of his own laboratory if he does not show at once whether there be any just cause or impediment why Miss Fawcett and myself should not be married. What more can I say to him? I think that will be pretty nearly enough. I have now arranged everything with an energetic precision of which Frank himself might be proud."

When Nell went home in the afternoon she hunted up the address to which she had sent the letter she dictated to Mabel's guardian.

"This is the place you are to go to," she said to Horace, when she was with him again at his studio at seven in the evening: "'The Châlet Fawcett, near Bayeux.' Mabel told me once that it was within a quarter of an hour's walk of Bayeux, so you can have no difficulty in finding it. And now it is time for you to start."

In less than an hour Horace was well on his way to Normandy.

"News, puss, news!" exclaimed Nell to Mabel, an hour later, at the convent. "He has positively gone!"

"Who has positively gone, Nell? and where has he positively gone to? You do say such startling things sometimes."

"Horace has gone to Normandy!"

"To Normandy? Do you mean that he has gone to HIM?"

"Yes; to Normandy, and to HIM."

"Oh, Nell! Oh, Horace! Oh, my! I shall never see him again. He will not come back alive."

"He has taken pistols and an opera hat."

"Nell, you are quite heartless. How could you let him go?"

"And a prayer-book to keep away sea-sickness by studying the marriage service."

"Marriage service? I don't care about the marriage service. He will never want it for me if he has gone to see Guardy. Guardy would think nothing of putting him in a stove or crucible or something."

"You are two geese, you and Horace. Here is he starting absurd notions that he can't marry you because you must be his sister. (He might just as well have lighted on me for a sister, and then it would have been all right.) And here are you in the most ridiculous terror because he has done the only sensible thing he could do in the circumstances, and gone to the fountain-head to prove himself wrong, when he will come back and marry you straight off. Why, I dare say you'll be married in a week from this, you stupid child!"

"It would take two months to arrange the t—trousseau," said Mabel, not quite certain whether to laugh or cry. "But do you really think he will be able to make it all right, Nell?"

"Of course he will. That is just what he has gone to do; and when Horace has really begun to do a thing, he doesn't stop till he has gone through with it. Sit down at the piano and play all the wedding marches you can think of, and then we will discuss the trousseau."

Horace's journey may be told in a very few words. From the train to the boat, from the boat to the train again; a tedious bit of travelling through an uninteresting bit of country, a change at Caen, and then at last Bayeux. Here, since he spoke French like a native, Horace had no difficulty in making known the place he wanted to reach, and learning the best way to reach it, but be sure he did not walk. By this time his mission had so completely absorbed him that he had no purpose but to get as quickly as possible to the châlet; and besides that, the weather was not favourable to loitering.

A raw and penetrating mist had just begun to descend on the town, and a black frost held the roads in an iron grip. Horace drove off as fast as he could, and presently, after the driver had made one or two wrong stoppages, the chaise turned into a gate at the end of a small avenue, and in another moment our friend was set down outside a

square, bleak-looking house, half buried amid a semicircular belt of trees.

The windows of the house were closed, some of them were shuttered, and blinds had been let down over the rest. It was not at all a cheerful place.

Horace paid and dismissed his driver, and pulled a rusty bell-handle. After a lapse of nearly five minutes, there was a sound of taking down a chain, and the door was opened by an English man-servant of grave aspect.

"Is Mr. Fawcett at home?"

"Mr. Fawcett is dead, sir," replied the servant, in a half whisper.

"Dead!" gasped Horace.

"Yes, sir; he died between eight and nine o'clock last night."

CHAPTER XLIV.

AT LECHFORD.

LECHFORD was a small, quiet, cleanly, and comely village. Its inhabitants were chiefly devoted to agriculture, and had no distinguishing peculiarities—physical, moral, or intellectual. The women were all good women, and pretty much like other women in other and similar communities. They bore a greater number of children than their husbands were capable of supporting; and scouted the payment of their tradesmen's bills until they were haled to the County Court. The men were all good men. They toiled in the fields by day, and poached by night. On Sundays they did not lie a-bed, or hang about the street, but put on clean corduroys and went into the fields to fly pigeons.

Early in the month of January in the year with which this story is concerned, this placid hamlet was moved in quite an unusual manner. A clergyman had arrived from London, who was intent on getting to the bottom of an old and well-nigh forgotten scandal.

The older inhabitants, those who could recall the details of the Haffenden affair, rose at once into the position of persons of importance; and the sobriety of the village underwent a sudden and abnormal change for the worse by reason of the alacrity of the younger generation in standing treat at the bar of the "Bit and Bridle Inn" to all persons over forty years of age who might be supposed to speak from personal knowledge of the circumstances. The parish clerk—who during five-and-twenty years had signed the pledge regularly on the morning after the annual churchwardens' dinner—fell away deplorably, because, as the

clergyman had taken lodgings in his house, his utterances on the subject were properly regarded as oracular, and his lightest word was considered cheap at a pint.

In one respect Lyne found it no difficult matter to prosecute his inquiry. The people were perfectly willing to talk, which was satisfactory in itself; but there was an evident absence of straightforwardness in their communications which was not so commendable. The truth was, these simple rustics had got a notion that the clergyman had somewhat of a partisan purpose in his inquiries; and smelling profit in the business, they wanted to know whether he were for or against the accused, that they might shape their reminiscences accordingly.

Lyne came to perceive this, and was duly disgusted. He let it be known that he wanted nothing so much as a plain statement of facts; that, in short, no one need be at the trouble of offering information who had not this to give.

This candour of speech produced the desired result; the seekers of gain fell away, and the path was smoothed for getting at as much of the truth as could be learned at that late day. The sum of this was, however, small. And beyond the bare facts of Sarah's leaving the village for a short time; of her return, accompanied by the child, and of her subsequent departure for good and all—the result, as it seemed, of the sailor's statement, of her own inability to confute it, and of the scandal which it caused in the village—beyond these facts, all was conjecture.

Nothing, however, could shake the belief of the villagers—as strong, apparently, at that day as it had ever been—in the sin and falsehood of Sarah. She had never, they averred, offered one jot or tittle of evidence in support of her story, though it was one which, if true, might have been readily proved.

Lyne inquired for the sailor whose statement about the childlessness of Sarah's brother had been the immediate cause of the trouble; but he, with his family, had left the village ten years before. And the former vicar of the parish, whose testimony would have been valuable, had long since been gathered to his fathers.

Frank began to feel the difficulties of his task, and his heart grew heavy at every fresh repetition of the hateful and

now familiar story. His disbelief in it was as strong as ever, but he was tormented when he felt that he was as little able as before to prove it false. Here in her own village the people who had known her most intimately were firmly persuaded of Sarah's guilt; he was as firmly persuaded of her innocence; but he was too honest and fair-minded not to admit that the weight of evidence was against him. He had learned nothing except what tended to confirm the case on the other side; and he could not bear to return to town and tell Nell of the utter failure of his mission.

On the afternoon that he was to leave, a chance word reached his ears which pricked his interest more than anything he had yet heard. It was to the effect that the oldest inhabitant of the village, a widow woman within a span of her hundredth year, was prepared to vouch that Sarah Haffenden had been married. Alone amongst her neighbours, they said, she had asserted and held to this for over twenty years. No one had believed her when she said it first, and her continued maintenance of a conviction which was scouted by the rest of the village, was apologised for on the ground that she was a very old woman and couldn't help it.

This Ancient, when she heard of Lyne and his mission, sent for him to her cottage. They told him she was daft, and that he would get nothing out of her. He said that if she had wit enough to send him a message, she could doubtless tell him as much as would serve his purpose. So he went, full of hope. But he was doomed to disappointment again. The woman *was* daft.

She was so very daft, that after she had been talking to him in a diffuse prophetic style for about ten minutes, she called to the girl that waited on her, and inquired who the gentleman was, and why he was sitting there.

The girl replied that this was the clergyman who was asking about Sarah Haffenden, and that she herself had sent for him on that subject.

"Sairey was married," said the old one, turning suddenly to Lyne, and laying a skinny brown hand on his sleeve. And then, in a momentary fit of lucidity, she went on: "Let 'em alone, they folk i' Lechford; they hain't got th' rights on't. *I* know. Sairey was married."

"Tell me all you know of this," said Lyne earnestly.

"Eh? speak up! I'm dull i' my ears. An owd woman I be." And the daft look began to cloud her wizened features again.

"I say," repeated Lyne, raising his voice, "do you know anything more of this?"

"Owe anything more? Me! Don't owe a copper cash to any of 'em. Ah! and bin fifty year a lone body wi'out one to do a stroke for me. Ninety-et come Ap'l."

Lyne was very patient.

"Do you know certainly that Sarah Haffenden was married?" he asked.

"*Is* Sairey buried? I'll lay she made a good end, and looked well i' her shroud. Who laid her out, sir?"

"Can *you* make her understand?" asked Lyne of the girl who stood by.

"No; there ain't no 'un can, when she's this way. That ain't wuth whiles tryin' of," answered the maiden placidly.

"I know'd her better 'n any of 'em," began the Ancient again. "Said to me, she said—but Lord! it don't matter: I'll be a rare owd un come Ap'l. Ask the gentleman what he wants, gal."

"*What*— did —Sarah — Haffenden — say—to—you?" shouted Lyne.

"Lawks! how you beller! I hain't so blamed bad of hearin' as all that come to. Said to me, said Sairey, 'Gran'mother' (it's what she allays called me), 'how you do wear, gran'mother!'"

Lyne rose in despair.

"Well, I towd ye," said the old one complacently. "A know'd I was the one to set ye right. They folk here, they couldn't read a woman like Sairey. She was a cute un. She come honest by that there bairn; mark ye my word. Show the clerg'man the cowcumber plot, gal."

"That's Janiwerry now," responded the "gal" with shrill contempt. "Hit ain't no cowcumber plots i' Janiwerry."

"Well, git me my tea. That wasn't thought manners for young uns t' answer owd uns when I was a girl. Show the gentleman the door, and say I'm ninety-et come Ap'l. You hain't said yit what he's come for."

Lyne was more disappointed than he cared to admit even to himself. Here had been a chance of clearing up the mystery, but it was useless to look for further help from that quarter. Had he but proved Nell the child of Sarah Haffenden by marriage, even though the marriage had been a secret one, he would have gone home well content; feeling that Nell would no longer have a valid reason to oppose to their marriage. But as it was, the situation was almost worse than it had been before.

Was any reliance to be placed on the old woman's assertion? She seemed firmly to believe what she said, but of what worth was a belief which was apparently incapable of proof?

The old woman had been a fast friend of the younger, at the last, indeed, her only friend; and it might have been that, with a secret of some sort on her mind, Sarah had made a confidante of the aged widow when she was unwilling to trust any other of her neighbours.

The weightier the secret, the more likely it would have been to outlive the rest of the old creature's memories; but, on the other hand, was it not possible that out of the strength of her affection for the persecuted woman she had invented a story which, if accepted, must have softened the opinion of the village against Sarah and her supposed transgression?

If it were a fiction, it had failed of its purpose, for no one had ever believed it. More than this, it had never been supported by any word from Sarah herself. So, much as he wanted to believe the story, Lyne felt bound to throw it over, until he could bring some credible testimony to its support.

He went back to his lodgings in a sore and rather bitter frame of mind.

CHAPTER XLV.

A SECRETARY AND A SOLICITOR.

When Horace received that strange and most startling intelligence of the death of Mr. Fawcett, he was so taken aback that for a moment or two he had no answer to make.

He looked with a blank expression into the face of his informant, and remained speechless.

The servant saw his bewilderment, and said, "You had better come inside, sir, and see the secretary."

Horace, still a good deal dazed, followed the man into the house, and across a bare carpetless hall, where the only piece of furniture was a skeleton with the customary grin.

Horace's guide led him into a room opening on the hall, and, saying that the secretary would come immediately, took his card, and left him alone.

There was nothing in his surroundings here calculated to raise the spirits of our friend, which were already depressed many degrees below their ordinary level. It was a long, low room, meagrely and even shabbily furnished, with some rather forbidding prints on the walls. The wind whistled in the chimney, there was no fire in the wide stone grate, and it was desperately cold.

Horace felt as uncomfortable as he ever remembered to have done, and if the thought of Mabel had not been uppermost in his mind he would have wished himself well out of this cheerless abode.

The mission he had come upon seemed a thousand times odder than it had done at any time before, and he

wondered what the secretary would say to it. He was not at all sure, on second thoughts, that he would tell the secretary anything about it; at any rate, he would take the measure of that gentleman before disclosing himself.

But the secretary turned out to be a very pleasant fellow. He came in before Horace had well made up his mind what to say, and received him with a sort of subdued cordiality.

The secretary was about Horace's own age, self-possessed, but very quiet in manner. He seemed much weighted by what had occurred, but glad, in a sober way, to see some one from the outer world.

"It is very cold in here," he said, with a slight shiver, after greetings had passed between the two men; "will you come into my room?"

They crossed the hall, and traversed a dark corridor (where there was another skeleton), at the end of which was a small three-cornered room with a wood fire burning on an open hearth. There was a faint smell of excellent tobacco in the room, and Horace felt more at ease.

"I hardly know how to introduce myself," he said, "but perhaps I had better come to the point at once. You have my card. I am an artist, and live in London; where I have recently met and—and become acquainted with Miss Fawcett. Can you tell me—forgive the abruptness of the question—whether Miss Fawcett is the daughter, or the ward, of the gentleman who died last night?"

The secretary looked slightly puzzled.

Horace repeated his question, and added:

"I am not come on an idle mission; the matter is one of great moment to me—and, perhaps I may add, to Miss Fawcett also."

The secretary continued to look puzzled, and replied slowly:

"I did not know that Mr. Fawcett had a daughter, and I never heard that he had a ward."

"That is very strange," said Horace.

The questioning look on his face had given way to an expression scarcely less puzzled than the secretary's; and his spirits, which had risen a degree or two as he entered the secretary's room, sank as before. If this man knew nothing, in what quarter was he to seek for light?

"Mr. Fawcett himself was not a friend of yours?" asked the secretary.

"No; I never saw or had any communication with him."

"And I," said the secretary, "had no share in Mr. Fawcett's confidence on any matter outside his scientific pursuits. I was his secretary, and his assistant in the laboratory, but nothing more. The very few family matters in which he appeared to be interested he transacted through his solicitor in London."

"Ah!" said Horace, brightening, "and can you give me the address of the solicitor?"

"Yes," replied the secretary promptly, evidently gratified at being able to afford this much assistance; "I can do that."

"I felt obliged," said Horace, "in order to explain this visit, to speak first of my own business. But of Mr. Fawcett himself—his death—— Was it not very sudden?"

"Terribly so. It was his habit to go into his laboratory alone, after our early dinner at five o'clock, and to remain there until eight, when I joined him to take down notes of his experiments. I went in at eight o'clock last night and found him dead upon the floor. There were fumes of a noxious gas in the room, strong enough then, though considerably diminished in force, to have overpowered me, had I not instantly thrown open the window. He was very daring, and sometimes hasty, in his experiments, and with respect to this particular one I had taken the liberty to caution him only the night before. That is how he met his death."

"The arranging of papers, and so forth, that will fall on you?" said Horace.

"I have put in order such papers as I have found. Amongst them was a sealed letter addressed to his solicitor in London, with a memorandum attached, 'To be forwarded immediately in case of my death.' I have forwarded the letter, and taken a copy of the address."

"May I have the address?" asked Horace.

"I will get it for you. I am sorry that I can be of no further help, but you can scarcely fail to obtain what you want from the solicitor. Mr. Fawcett was a man who lived very much within himself; so far as I am aware, no relative

ever visited him here; I am certain, at any rate, that no lady has ever been in the house since he occupied it. No one of us here knew anything of him except as a student of science. He lived in and for that entirely. So far as I could see, and I have been closely associated with him for seven years, there was nothing else in life that interested him. That, Mr. Monteith, is all that I am able to tell you of my late master."

"I am very greatly obliged to you," said Horace. "There is, then, nothing for me to do but to return to town at once and apply to the solicitor."

"I scarcely care," said the secretary, "to ask you to spend the day and night with us. As you can see, we are not exactly in the position to be hospitable. It is of you, however, and not of myself, that I am thinking, and if you *will* stay I should like your company."

"You are very kind," said Horace, "but I am anxious to be back as quickly as possible; and I believe I can return almost immediately."

Half an hour later Horace was in the train again, and before noon on the following day he was on his way to Bedford Row.

Mr. Joseph George, Bedford House, Bedford Row, was the address with which he had been furnished by the secretary.

"If the solicitor is as good a fellow as the secretary," thought Horace, "it ought to be fairly pleasant sailing."

But the solicitor was a solicitor.

He was a short, plethoric man, with an affection of the throat which obliged him to speak in a whisper, and a perpetual air of waiting for a verdict, which he expected would be given for the other side. Having a very extensive practice he did not seek new clients, and his glance at Horace said, with considerable plainness, "You have called at a busy hour. I shall be glad to see your back as soon as possible."

Horace began by observing that he had that morning returned from France, where he had been on a special visit to Mr. Edgar Fawcett.

"He's dead," jerked out the solicitor, in an abrupt and rather petulant whisper.

As Horace was but just come from the house where

Mr. Fawcett had died, this observation seemed a trifle superfluous, but he replied that he was aware of it, and that Mr. Fawcett's death was the cause of his visit to Mr. George.

"Are you concerned about the will?"

"For myself no, but——" and Horace hesitated.

"For whom do you act?" interrupted Mr. George.

"I am here to make an inquiry about Mr. Fawcett's ward."

"In that lady's interest, or in your own?" inquired the solicitor, in a dry, sharp whisper.

"In the interests of both."

"Hum! Take a chair. You were a friend of the late Mr. Fawcett?"

"N—no. I did not know——"

"Then what is the ground of your inquiry?"

"I have a strong reason for wishing to know who Miss Fawcett is."

"But you have this moment spoken of her as the late Mr. Fawcett's ward!"

"*Is* she his ward?"

"I am the only man living who can say."

"It is under that impression that I have come to you."

"I start for Normandy this evening," was Mr. George's reply; "to-morrow evening I shall read the will of Mr. Fawcett in his house; until the will has been read, I can give no information on the subject."

"But Miss Fawcett——" began Horace.

"Has been informed of Mr. Fawcett's death, and will hear from me further at a future date."

"But will you not even answer my question?" said Horace, who was preserving his temper admirably.

"I have said all that I am at liberty to say."

"Which amounts to nothing," said Horace curtly.

"Just so," replied the solicitor in a bland whisper, and touched his gong. "Tell Mr. Brown I am ready to see him," he said to the clerk who answered the bell. "Good morning, Mr. Monteith. Is the Channel very rough? Ah, how d'ye do, Brown; come in, come in," and the door which had been opened to admit the new-comer was promptly closed upon Horace.

"A man who goes to France on a fool's errand," ruminated Horace, as he took his way home to his studio, "can scarcely grumble if he returns from France with a fool's reward. Confound it! I have been turned inside-out on the Channel, and been horribly battered on a French railway, and all for what? To get the first news of the guardian's death. I should have known it by this time if I had stayed at home. I have two minds to go back to France to-night, and hear the will read. I could drown Joseph George in the Channel on the way home. But about the will? It may tell us nothing more than we know at present. A guardian like that, if he had a secret at all, would be just the creature to keep it up after his death. It would be something for him to chuckle over in the shades. What a pickle it all is! I wonder how poor little Mabel feels about it. Should one congratulate or condole with her? I'll send a wire to Nell."

CHAPTER XLVI.

SARAH'S SECRET.

LYNE awoke very ill at ease on the morning after his return from Lechford. He had a sense of being baffled, which was galling to a man of his energetic and determined habit. Turn in what direction he might, the object of his pursuit eluded him.

An invisible hand from out of the past seemed to have thrust itself between Nell and him, which could not be brushed aside.

All that he had discovered as yet was against them, and he almost shrank from the notion of continuing the search. But to this he was impelled—because the honour and good name of Nell must be established, and she would not marry him unless they were.

Along with a letter to Nell, written immediately after his arrival on the previous evening, he had sent to Mr. Meadowsweet an intimation of the fruitlessness of his search at Lechford. During breakfast the Vicar walked into his room, and observed in a general and cheery way that men who fainted in the chase were not worthy of their salt.

"I don't say that any friend of mine has fainted, you know," he continued, "but I gather from your note that you are rather disgusted with Lechford. For my part I never thought you could learn much there, and the real part of the work is now to begin."

"You are a sturdy friend and full of comfort," said Lyne, helping his visitor to coffee. "Know, then, that though Lechford has failed me utterly, I am not yet in despair. What is your counsel now?"

"We settled on the next step before you went to Lechford," said the Vicar; "you are now to hunt up the registers in the water-side parishes."

"Yes," said Lyne, "to verify the birth of the brother's child."

"Just so," said the Vicar, "if you can. But while looking for the baptismal register, you must also look for the marriage."

"Why so?" said Lyne; "we know that they were married."

"Yes," answered the Vicar, "but, supposing Nell to be the child of Sarah's brother, the birth was a posthumous one, and the mother died almost immediately; it is possible then, if not probable, that the child was never christened in the parish where the mother had lived. Sarah might or might not have had that done after she had taken the child with her to the country."

"But I don't quite see how, if I find the marriage, that will assist me," said Lyne.

"In this way. Suppose you light upon the marriage, make inquiries of any old residents in the immediate neighbourhood as to where the couple had their lodging. If you can discover their lodging the rest will be easy, for I know from Sarah that the wife died in the house from which she was married."

"Thank you," said Lyne. "Yes, that is a pretty straight course; tell me, have you seen Nell since she had my letter?"

"I was with her last night when it arrived."

"Well?"

"Oh, she is none too fearful about it. She has had a wonderful faith both in herself and in you since you said that come what might you would win the day for both."

"She is a dear, brave girl, and so I will," said Lyne. "And do you know that I was ashamed to go to her last night with my story of failure on my lips."

"Then you did well to stay at home," replied the Vicar, "for you must show her neither shame nor weakness. See now, I have ten days in town yet; I give you that time in which to set all straight. Is it long enough?"

"We shall see," said Lyne, "we shall see."

That afternoon saw the commencement of his search.

A man so widely known as Frank Lyne was in all the East End of London, had no difficulty in putting himself in the position to prosecute a task like this. He was on the best of terms with his clerical brethren, and neither foresaw nor found any difficulty in obtaining access to the churches he wanted to visit, and overhauling their registers. He spent an hour and a half by candle-light that afternoon, poring over the yellow leaves of volumes whose records were beginning to be dim. The verger hovering about him sniffed a curious sniff, and Lyne, who despised no help, told him what it was that he looked for.

The verger was prepared to state on oath that no such name as Haffenden had even been entered in those registers, but Lyne did not accept his assurance until he had exhausted the books. So the first day's search came to an end, and yielded nothing. The endeavours of the next day were equally vain. Three churches gave up their records, but never the name of Haffenden.

"I have never believed," said Mr. Meadowsweet, throwing out a morsel of consolation on the evening of the second day, "but that if a needle were lodged in a haystack. and I had my best pair of glasses about me, I would find it."

"And if my needle be in existence," answered Lyne, "it will go hard with me but I will pick it out."

On the afternoon of the third day Lyne set out in a spirit of dogged resolution.

"I have a presentiment," he said, "that I shall find what I want to-day."

He was bound for the church of St. Stephen, whose gray old tower may be seen through the masts of innumerable vessels by one who sits in a boat midway between the banks of the Thames, nearly opposite the quaint red house of the harbour-master. It is one of the oldest churches in England. You descend into it by a flight of stone steps, so that when you stand within the worm-eaten oaken porch you are several feet below the level of the street. The place strikes very chill on entering; there is a suspicion of moisture on the dark flagged aisle, on the brown stone, and on the yellow pillars. The aisle rings to the foot with a hollow sound, but it is else so silent that you might fancy yourself in a forsaken temple of Egypt, rather than within a stone's throw of the swarming London

docks. The verger of this remarkable church was in keeping with the building. An old, pink-eyed man, with a rusty beard and an arched back, and a gentle mustiness pervading him.

"If there was two or three more of us, it wouldn't be a bad-sized congregation as times go," he said drily as he shambled across to the vestry. "The books are here," he went on, tapping an iron safe which stood in a corner of the room, "and this is the key. A sight of books, eh? And between you and me, sir, if the stories was known of all the parties whose names is entered here, it would be better reading than a tale-book or a sermon. Lord, to think of it. There's them whose names is entered here has swung upon the gallows—I saw one of 'em myself. I thought *he* wouldn't die in his bed, for he gave me a flash crown with a hole in it, and the wicked, says Scripture, shall be turned into hell. What was the name you wanted, sir?"

"I want," said Lyne, who did not relish the garrulous reminiscences of the verger, "I want the name of Haffenden. Do you recollect that name?"

"About how many years ago might it be?"

"About twenty-three or twenty-four."

"I haven't got it in mind; but look for yourself. There's no end of names there, and all sorts. If you don't find that one, you'll find some that's not far from it."

But Lyne had already turned impatiently to one of the registers, and was scanning its pages with rapid careful glance.

"Time was," said the verger, whom the absence of attention on the part of his audience did not concern in the least; "time was when I could have reeled you off three or four pages of those names without so much as looking at the book. But, Lord! it didn't do me no good. It isn't memory that saves a man. Give me charity, says Paul——"

A sudden and startled exclamation from Lyne checked the old man's gabble.

"Have you found it?" he asked.

"Look here!" exclaimed Lyne excitedly. "Look here! What does this mean? Here is an entry of the marriage of Sarah Haffenden. *Was* Sarah Haffenden married, then, after all?"

He turned an eager questioning look on the unintelligent face of the verger, and pointed with his finger to an entry in the register.

"We've married a many Sarahs, take one year with another."

"Yes, man, yes; but what is that to me? I tell you it was her brother's marriage I was looking for, and not hers. How came Sarah Haffenden to be married, and how came she to be married here?"

"Read out the entry, sir. I don't call that name to mind."

"Light your lamp; it is growing dark. Quick, man, quick! How you fumble; here, give me the match. Now hold up the lamp."

The mumbling verger, who began to catch a little ot Lyne's excitement, held the lamp up over his head, and Lyne read the record of the marriage of "Sarah Haffenden, spinster, 33, of the Parish of Lechford, Essex, with Charles Greyson Montagu, aged 36, gentleman."

Lyne's heart leaped within him. He had solved the mystery. Sarah was married, and to a gentleman of good name. Nell was of honest birth; he could almost have cried for joy.

"Aha!" said the verger, but in an altered tone, and with rather a curious expression, "Charles Greyson Montagu; I remember him. But—but, well, he's dead; and them that's dead is dead."

"What do you mean?"

"D'ye know, sir, where Charles Greyson Montagu lies dead?"

"No. I know nothing of him."

"He lies dead, sir, in a prison graveyard in Australia."

For a moment Lyne hated this old man. He seemed like an evil genius, suddenly risen between him and his hopes. The old man stroked his rusty beard, and peered at Lyne out of the corners of his pink eyes. His memory had returned.

"Are you sure of what you say?" asked Lyne. "What do you know about this man?" and he pointed with his finger to the name in the register.

"I've said," answered the verger, "that if we knew the stories of all the parties——"

"I care for no story but this man's," interrupted Lyne, with his finger still on the name of Montagu.

"Very good, sir, very good. But Lord! what a quick man you are; and you look so strange. Wait, I'll light the other lamp. That's better; now I can see you fair. I recollect the story well, and I'll tell it to you."

"Tell it as briefly as you can, please; but omit nothing. This is very, very important to me."

"I remember the marriage now, as well as if it had been yesterday. The bride came first. She came quite alone, and a fine good-looking girl she was. It was about half after eleven, and she waited a quarter of an hour, and still the bridegroom hadn't come. I threw in a word to say I'd known 'em come on the stroke of the clock, but she never noticed me. Five minutes more, and in walks the bridegroom—very flustered. He was alone, too. The vicar we had then was one of these slow fellows that never turns up till the organist has played his voluntary half through again, and he was late too. The bridegroom—he was a great handsome man, affable, and quite the gentleman—swore pretty loud. There's many does that when the vicar's late, and I uses my handkerchief to make believe I has a cold, for the bride don't like it when the bridegroom swears. But the vicar came in the nick of time, and the marriage was done in a twinkling. They were married in haste, if ever a couple were; and they didn't lose much time in the vestry, I can tell you. The bridegroom went slap-dash at the register, and the bride signed after him—I wouldn't have believed she was thirty-three if I hadn't seen the figures. There was a five-pound note for the vicar, and a sovereign for me; and before you could say Amen they were out of the church."

"Well?" said Lyne, for the verger made a pause.

"Well, sir, I had just put away the books, and was wrapping up the sovereign in a morsel of paper, and saying over to myself 'for better for worse,' and so on, when a police constable walked into the church, and up to the vestry. 'You've just married a couple here?' said he. 'The vicar has,' says I, for I was pretty jocular over that sovereign, you see. 'I want the bridegroom,' said he. 'Bless you! he's off on the wings of love ten minutes since,' I answered him, for I was still very sprightly over that

sovereign. Well, the constable was a good deal put about, for he seemed to have made haste to be in time. 'A friend of the family?' said I, for I thought maybe he was to have stood best man, and had lost his way. Ours isn't an easy church to find. 'Not exactly,' he said, and smiled in a way they call dry. 'There's a warrant out against Charley Montagu; he's wanted on a charge of coining.' With that I whips out my sovereign, and puts it between my teeth. *It was a bad one.* 'Ah, that's one of Charley's own,' said the constable, with another of his smiles. 'He's wonderful free with his sovereigns, is Charley.' You might have knocked me over with the alms-bag. Well, I told him as best I could the way they'd gone, and he was off again. I felt very bad all day about that sovereign, and in the evening I bought a paper to see whether my constable had come up with Mr. Montagu, but there was nothing in it. I watched the papers close for two days, and then I saw it: 'Arrest of the notorious Charles Montagu, *alias* Dick White,' and then a lot of description how he'd had the brass to get married openly at a church within a hundred yards of the house where he was supposed to have carried on his coining. Then the trial came on. It was a big affair, and made a lot of talk, for it seemed he was one of the cutest and best-known criminals in the country, and had been several times lagged. Well, it was 'Guilty,' you can be sure; and the sentence was twenty years. He was kept here for a year, and then they transported him. After that, I don't know how it was, but I took quite a deal of interest reading police-reports, and such-like, and that was how it was, I suppose, that I fell across the news of this man's death in the settlement in Australia seven years later. That's the story of Charles Greyson Montagu, sir. What became of his poor wife I don't know. She kept herself very quiet, and her name didn't figure in the papers."

"I should like to see the record of this," said Lyne.

He was very pale, and spoke low, and his voice was a little unsteady.

"I've got it all pasted in a scrap-book in my house. If you like to come into the next street, I'll show it to you."

Lyne went with him, and the verger brought out his scrap-book and turned up the various newspaper reports of

the case. Lyne read them through word by word. The old man's story was true in every detail, down to its miserable end with the coiner's death in the penal settlement in Australia.

He read it with an increasing sense of sickness and bitterness, and a groan escaped him at the finish.

He gave something to the verger, muttered a vague word about the painful character of the story, and left the house.

It was pitch dark, and a cutting sleet was driving through the street; but Lyne's head was burning so that he lifted his hat for a moment to let the sharp flakes fall on it. His brain felt oppressed as by a nightmare. His mind was wild and disordered. He had stood, as he thought, on the brink of happiness; he had been pushed over, and found himself in a whirling slough deeper than that of Despond.

How could he face Nell with the wretched tale he had just learned? Better to know no father at all, than a father who lay a convicted felon in a felon's grave.

What wonder Sarah had not told the secret of her shameful marriage, and had shrunk from telling Nell her birth and parentage!

Lyne reached his home and paced his room for hours, tortured by doubts what it were best to do, what best to tell, and what to leave untold.

How could Nell be saved the knowledge of what had come to him?—for saved she must be.

He would let her hope a little longer—nay, he himself would still try to hope, though but faintly.

To-morrow he would renew the search; what if he should yet discover that Sarah's brother had left a child? That had not been disproved; it was a straw to cling to.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

"A BROUGHAM WITH A CREST ON IT."

"MISS HAFFENDEN, Miss Haffenden, my dear!"

The voice was Teresa's, and there was a shrill eagerness, a certain elation, not unmingled with chagrin, in the tone.

"What is it, Miss Gripp?" answered Nell a little languidly.

She had just come from the studio, and was stretched in a low chair before the fire in her room.

She was feeling very sad; there was a touch at her heart of the cold gray winter that made the great city look so desolate and grim. It was several days since she had seen Frank, but that was not all that made her sad. She would not have minded had his letters been different. Frank had penned those letters carefully, but his very anxiety to speak lightly about the failure of his task had betrayed him, and she saw that there was something he kept behind. They were such a simple couple, he and she; deception came very hard to them. A sore conviction had been stealing into her mind the last few days that she and Frank were not to realise the greatest happiness of their lives. They were to learn and put in practice the saint's lesson of self-sacrifice, the greatest and the sorest lesson our life can teach us. She and Frank were not destined to reap the harvest of their love. This was the aching certainty that began to force itself upon her mind.

"Miss Haffenden, Miss Haffenden, my dear, I wouldn't have had it happen for anything in the world, that Matilda should just have stepped round to the chemist for the preparation."

"What is it, Miss Grïpp?" and Nell rose from her chair, and crossed the room and looked down the stairs, at the foot of which stood Teresa, flushed and trembling.

"It is a brougham with a crest on it."

"Is there any one inside it?"

"Good gracious! What a ridiculous question. There are two ladies."

"Well, I will go and let them in."

"You! Certainly not. It must be *you* they have come to see. No; it is my fault, and I will suffer the penalty. I will open the door myself."

"But I don't mind in the least. I will tell them Matilda has gone for the preparation. They are Mr. Lyne's sisters, I think."

"And do you suppose I would allow them to see you playing housemaid? I have some respect for you, Miss Haffenden, if you have none for yourself. I will admit them myself."

"Well, Miss Gripp, if you will. Let them come up here; I have just lighted my fire."

"I have half a mind," mused Miss Gripp, as she adjusted her ringlets with the aid of a pocket looking-glass, "to make Joseph sprinkle a little flour on his hair, and go to the door. But I don't think he would deceive them; Joseph has no style."

"Any visitors in the world but these!" Nell had thought. It was so hard to receive them now. A few days ago she would have been glad. What did she care that they saw her in that meagre little house in Brompton? It was nothing to her, and she cared not whether any one noticed that the stair-carpet and wall-paper were shabby, and the furniture dingy and too large for the rooms, and that everything in the house gave out evident tokens of the straitened means of the inmates. But how should she receive the sisters of Frank, at a time when she was wondering with a sickening sense how soon Frank and she would be put asunder for ever?

"How do you do, Miss Haffenden? We have been a long while returning your call, I am afraid; but the weather, has it not been dreadful! And our coachman has had such a terrible cold." It was Julia who spoke, and she extended a glove as she did so.

"How are you, dear?" said Lucy, and kissed Nell with more than a show of affection, a greeting which Nell returned in kind.

"Oh! what a charming little room," went on Lucy. "Quite a studio in miniature, I declare!"

Nell had lighted her lamp, and drawn the curtain across the window. This was her own snuggery, and though the smallest, she had certainly made it the prettiest room in the house. There were her few books scattered about; most of them her old tutor had given her, including three or four of the humorists of the world—Cervantes, Rabelais, Sterne, and Collins's and Frere's "Aristophanes." There were a couple of little figures in brown wood which Julian Harte had given her, with a water-colour drawing or two by his wife. She had added a trifle of colour here and there in the shape of a bit of Indian drapery, and an old figured screen, and the table was strewn with some sketches of her own, and prints bearing on the Wiclif work.

"But you look tired," said Lucy again. "It was a dreadfully stupid hour for us to call, but you see, we knew it was no use coming earlier, for we should not have found you at home. I think it must be such fun to have a profession, and come home at tea-time like a man."

"And such a very masculine profession," put in Julia. "I really do not think we know a single lady sculptor except Miss Haffenden, do we, Lucy?"

"No; but is it not ever so plucky of her to have entered the profession? *I* think it is."

"I am very proud of my profession," said Nell, "though not very proud as yet of what I have done in it. I mean to go on, however, until I have achieved something."

"And your relatives, do they like it?" inquired Julia.

"I have no relatives," answered Nell.

Julia opened her eyes rather wide, and elevated her eyebrows slightly, but forbore to express her surprise in words.

Lucy said quickly:

"You have lived in the country always, haven't you, Nell?"

"Yes," replied Nell, turning with a soft expression to the more friendly sister. "I lived in a quiet village in the north with my aunt, until she died."

"The country is charming when you have a full house," observed Julia. "We have spent several weeks there at different times, and I very often enjoyed it. But it was stupid in the mornings, when the men went out shooting. Did you ride to hounds?"

"I have so longed to ride to hounds," said Lucy.

"I don't think I ever saw a hound in my life," said Nell. "They did not meet anywhere near us. But I used to walk five miles to bathe on the coast; and I used to wander through the woods alone all day sometimes. Yes, the country is indeed charming; but I like London too."

A motive of good-humoured malice prompted Nell to tell her visitors a little more about her life in Wilton-Henry. She wanted to say that when she was not with her tutor, or indulging in those solitary day-long rambles along the beach or through the woods, she was occupied with the very material cares of their little cottage; that her aunt had scolded her a hundred times for spoiling the bread or ruining the butter; that she had made her own and the good Sarah's garments from the time when she learned to use her needle; and that their generally uneventful life had been marked by crises, too frequent to be of pleasant remembrance, when it seemed doubtful whether the profits of the butter would meet the demands of the village tradesman. But she thought of Frank, and held her peace.

"Yes, London is the only place after all," said Lucy.

"But it must often be rather awkward for one in your position, Miss Haffenden," began Julia, "I mean, you know, living alone, and without relatives. We women are so absurdly hampered. How do you get about—you have no chaperon?"

"I am generally my own chaperon," laughed Nell. "You see, I have been thrown for a long while so entirely on my own resources, that I have grown accustomed to play propriety to myself. I am afraid it will sound rather dreadful to you, but I am my own Mrs. Grundy."

"It does indeed sound a little strange," said Julia.

"Masculine, I am afraid, like my profession," said Nell. "But I have found that I can do it with no very serious consequences. You see, I generally go to and from the studio alone, so that I have grown familiar with the streets, and have no fear of them. Why should I have? Thousands

of girls in London walk them, as I do, every day of their lives. They are obliged to do it, as I am; and I have seen enough to be sure that it rests with themselves whether they do it in safety or not. I am not too timid to call a hansom if I want one, and I have dined alone in a restaurant."

"You really could not do it, dear, if you went much into society," said Lucy.

"Perhaps not, though I don't think that would make much difference to me," answered Nell pleasantly. "At any rate," she added, "I do *not* go very much into society."

"And you are an only child, Miss Haffenden?" said Julia, who prided herself on her adroitness in turning a conversation.

"I suppose I am," answered Nell, quietly. She did not like the question, but she could not answer no, and was too truthful to say yes. She was aware that her reply must sound stupid, but at that moment she had scarcely more knowledge than Julia who or what she was.

Julia directed a curious and rather startled look at her from under her drooping eyelids, but said nothing.

The entry of Joe with the tea-tray interrupted a somewhat awkward pause. Joe, who could do most things at a pinch, was quite equal on occasion to discharging the functions of waiter. Unlike Teresa, he felt in no way humiliated by the office, and though he had not been prevailed upon to sprinkle flour on his hair, his limp gave a professional touch to the character; as I have observed that butlers in good families, when they have passed their sixtieth year, acquire an added dignity by an artistic simulation of gout.

In after years Joe used to relate, as a master-stroke of diplomatic wit, how he had apologised for the absence of cream by the simple statement that there was not any in the house.

"Do come and see us again soon," said Lucy, when the ladies rose to leave. "You have no excuse now, you know, after telling us how independent you are."

"Frank has not said a word to us as to when you are to be married," said Julia, who had been burning all through the visit for information on this point, and was determined not to go without an effort to obtain it.

"Neither has he to me," answered Nell. "But I promise you that you shall know it as soon as I do."

When the sisters were half-way down the stairs Lucy turned, and ran up again.

"You *do* look tired," she said to Nell; "and I don't think you're very well either. I believe you work too hard."

"No, Lucy dear, I don't work hard enough. I mean to work twice as hard in the future."

"I think Frank is going to have a good brave wife. I wish I were like you," said the little Lucy; and when they kissed one another Nell had a struggle to prevent her tears from betraying her.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SEARCH IS FINISHED.

How Lyne began to hate those water-side parishes! They were accursed ground to him from the day on which he discovered in the vestry of St. Stephen's the record of the marriage of Sarah Haffenden with a gentleman rogue.

But he held to his task with a dogged honest resolve not to abandon it until he had carried it to the end. His hopes had sunk almost to zero, but he never flinched.

On the second day after his visit to St. Stephen's he found the entry he had been seeking.

It was the entry of the marriage of Sarah Haffenden's sailor brother.

With an exclamation, half of triumph, and half of expectation, he flung the book aside, and turned to the baptismal registers. He went through one of them and found nothing. He went through a second, with a like result. Then fear, and the old feeling of defeat, began to creep in on him again.

He took up one by one, and went minutely through the registers of ten years, but found no record of the baptism of any child of Daniel Haffenden. He shut with an impatient gesture the last volume for the tenth year, and, leaning his arms on it, wondered, with wrinkled brow and lips compressed, whether anything remained for him to do.

Poor Frank! Poor Nell! The stars in their courses seemed to fight against them.

If Sarah's brother had no child, Nell must be the child

of Sarah by a felon father. Lyne revolved the matter in his mind, and saw no escape. He had got to the root of it at last. But there never was a man so hard to beat. A moment more of wretched perplexity, and he got up and locked away the books, and left and locked the church; then turned and began to scan the neighbourhood.

It was a regular seaman's quarter. A briny atmosphere pervaded the narrow streets, which, however, were well kept and cleanly. The small, low houses had a brown, weather-beaten aspect, there was a smell of oil and rope and tarpaulin in the air, every third man in the street was a sailor, and fifty per cent. of the little old-fashioned shops had some connection with the sea.

The dusk of a January afternoon, in which a river-fog played its part, was falling on the streets, and little twinkling lamps began to glimmer in the windows.

Lyne turned into one of the oldest of the shops—he had to clamber down a wooden staircase to reach it—and put a question to the owner. He was answered and left the shop.

He picked out another one, which seemed as old as the first, put the same question to the person in charge, received the same answer, and came out again.

He walked about then for ten minutes or so, until he stopped in front of the shop of a general dealer, which was also the post office for the district. The name over the door was Redpath.

He went in, and asked to see Mr. Redpath.

"Mr. Redpath is not in."

"Will he be in soon?"

"Can't say, sir; Mrs. Redpath is in."

"I should like to see Mrs. Redpath."

Lyne wrote a word in pencil on his card, and handed it to the boy behind the counter, who opened a door at the end of the shop, and disappeared up a flight of stairs.

In a moment or two he came down again, and asked Lyne to follow him. Frank went after the boy up a short flight of winding stairs, which were almost totally dark, crossed a landing, and was shown into a small low-ceilinged room.

A neat old woman, in cap and spectacles, rose from her chair by the fire and curtsied.

"You are Mrs. Redpath?" said Lyne, when the door had closed upon them.

"Yes, sir."

"Your husband, I think, is one of the churchwardens for this parish?"

"He has been the people's churchwarden, sir, for thirty years."

"I have had the Rector's permission," said Lyne, "to examine the registers of the church for an entry I wanted. I wished to know whether your husband could give me any information about Daniel Haffenden, who was married in the church twenty-four years ago."

"He died at sea, sir."

"You knew him, then?"

"Not much of him, sir, for he joined his ship a week after his marriage; but we knew his wife well. She lived with us from her marriage till death."

"Ah! it was a good fate that sent me here. I am glad that I have found you, Mrs. Redpath. You will be able to tell me what I have been seeking."

"I can tell you all about Ann Haffenden, sir."

"I have been searching the baptismal registers for the birth of a child of theirs."

"Sir, they never had a child."

"You are mistaken. I am sure they had a child.'

"No, sir, they had no child."

Lyne's face must have shown something of the sharp pain that shot through him, for the churchwarden's wife said at once, in a kindly tone:

"You have some interest in this, sir. If you will let me, I will tell you all I know about it."

"I shall be greatly obliged if you will," he replied. "I am more interested in this than I can say, and I would give anything in the world to know that those two had left a child."

"Ah! sir, then I wish I could say aught but this, that no one living knows better than I do that they had none."

"Tell me what you can then, please."

"The sailor and his w fe came straight here from the church, sir; in fact, she had been married from here. She was a stranger in London, had come from somewhere in the

country, from Essex, I think; and a few days before the marriage she called with her lover's sister—I think *her* name was Sarah—at our shop, seeing it was the post office, and asked if we could recommend her a decent lodging near by."

"You saw Sarah Haffenden, then?"

"Yes, sir, I recollect her well; a very handsome young woman, and well spoken; a few years older, I believe, than she looked."

"Was Sarah Haffenden married, do you know?"

"Not at that time, sir, I think; but—though I can't tell you the rights of this—I believe she was married very soon after, and rather sadly too."

"Ah! And of her sister-in-law?"

"Well, sir, we sometimes took a lodger ourselves at that time, and liking the young woman, we let our room to her. Sarah Haffenden shared it with her until the day of the marriage. A week after the marriage the husband had to join his ship. It was earlier than he expected, and I remember what a trouble it was to both of them, as nice and good a young couple as ever were. Well, he left her for a long voyage; he wasn't to be back for nine or ten months. But he never came back at all. It was a little more than nine months after he sailed when she had the news that the ship was wrecked, and her husband amongst the drowned. She never got over it. She fell away every day; we could see her dying. Her sister-in-law came, and was more than sister to her, though I believe she had a trouble of her own at that time. She stayed with her to the last, and buried her. Poor dear! I had grown fond of her."

"And they had no child?"

"They had no child, sir."

"And do you think that Sarah Haffenden had been married at that time?"

"Yes, sir, I am almost certain of it; though she said no word to me, nor, I believe, to her brother's wife."

"She had no child with her?"

"No, sir."

"You have given me the whole story as you know it, Mrs. Redpath?"

"Yes, sir, that is the whole story."

"I would have given anything in the world," said Lyne, for the second time, "to know that those two had left a child."

Mrs. Redpath asked him to stay and see her husband, that he might confirm the story, but Lyne saw that there was no need; and what he had heard had made him too wretched to care about hearing it again.

In a few minutes he was on his way home, and it seemed as he went that he left Nell behind him at every step. He passed the church of St. Stephen, and the church he had visited that afternoon. They were tombs, in each of which a bit of him lay buried. He had carried his search to the end; he had gathered the fruit of his labour, and it was poison in his lips. Lyne was a good man, but as he went home that night he cursed Martin Clymo in his heart, who had robbed him of his love.

He looked forward to such another evening as he had passed two nights ago, so that it was with a sense of pleasure and relief, on reaching home, that he found Horace disposed in his most comfortable chair in front of the fire. No one could look on Horace, in any situation whatever, without being persuaded that there was a certain amount of solid satisfaction to be got out of life. Horace's cigarette case lay beside him, and the pile of ashes he had bestowed on one of Frank's favourite volumes showed that he had been waiting some time for his friend. He had made tea for himself and drunk it, and was in the act of placing a fresh brew in the fender to keep warm for the owner.

"Well, my disconsolate friend, you are as usual making the best of it, I see," said Frank.

"I have had the best of it," replied Horace, indicating the earthenware teapot in the fender, "but if you will wait five minutes, the second wash will be far from despicable."

They had not seen one another for some little time. Horace had made his expedition to France, and Frank had been occupied in the manner already described in the interim.

"What news with you?" asked Frank, when he had put himself on the other side of the fire, and taken the cup Horace had filled for him.

"An exceedingly choppy Channel (O, Neptune! Shaker of the Shores!), an unquiet railway, two skeletons, a private

secretary disposed to be communicative but with nothing to communicate, a family solicitor with plenty to communicate but not disposed to be communicative."

"A private secretary and a family solicitor? But what of the guardian?"

"I do not know. He is beyond communicating, whether he would or no."

"What do you mean?"

"The guardian died the night I crossed the Channel."

"How strange! But surely his death put an end to the mystery?"

"By no means. He has left us the mystery as a legacy. At present it is in the keeping of the family solicitor, who is devoting a day or two to reading the will to the secretary and the skeletons, and who will divulge nothing until the reading is finished."

"Oh, but come, come, it must be finished by this time. Probably Miss Fawcett knows everything now."

"She did not know anything this morning."

"Well, that is a little strange; but there can be no real hitch now. The solicitor has found matters to arrange over there. He is waiting to communicate until everything is in order. Be sure that you will hear immediately. Give me another cup of tea, and don't look so pinched about it. You are in sight of port."

"Perhaps so. I hope so, at any rate, for I begin to feel that I have been an egregious fool. But what have you been doing, Frank?"

Frank turned a weary glance on his friend, and Horace read in his eyes the failure of his search.

"You see, I do not answer. You know what that means," he said at length. "Well, I will tell you what I have done, Racy. I went down to Essex, as you know, spent a couple of days there, and got no good. You remember Mr. Meadowsweet suggested that Sarah Haffenden might have been secretly married. I kept that before me, and inquired upon it. All the people in the village scouted it; they were convinced that the child was Sarah's, but not by marriage. Just before I left I was sent for by a half-witted centenarian, who said she had known Sarah Haffenden better than any one else in the village, and declared positively that she had been married. But when

I asked for proof she wandered, and could give none. I left the place disgusted, because, you see, putting aside the inconclusive words of the old woman, everything that I had gone there to prove had been disproved for me."

"But it amounted to no more than suspicion, after all; you did not get any real proofs."

"It was a strong case, Racy, for all that."

"Well, what did you do then?"

"I came back to town, and since then have been working day and night in the districts by the river to find proof of the birth of a child to Sarah Haffenden's brother."

"And you have not found it?"

"I have not."

"Have you found nothing?"

"Yes; I have found that Sarah herself was married."

"Heavens! You have found that?"

"Yes."

"Why, but surely that proves all?"

"That is what I think."

"Nell, then, is the child of Sarah?"

"I fear that it is so."

"Fear! why fear, Frank?"

"Listen, and I will tell you. The verger of the church was with me when I found the entry of the marriage in the register in the vestry. He had been present at the marriage, and told me all he knew of it. Within a couple of days of the marriage the husband was arrested as a coiner. He was tried, convicted, and transported. Seven years later he died a convict in Australia."

"It is a horrible story; but have you anything more than the verger's word to support it?"

"Yes; he took me to his house, and showed me the newspaper reports of the case, and the record of the man's death in Australia."

"Did you find any record of the birth of a child?"

"No, none; though I went back to the church the day after and searched the registers. Still, that there was a child, we know. She had it with her in the village; and the baptism would scarcely have taken place in the church where she was married. There could have been no pleasant associations for her there, and besides, she did not remain in London."

"But of the brother and his marriage; what of that?" asked Horace.

"I discovered that this afternoon," answered Frank. "And I proved beyond a doubt that the brother left no child, for I found the woman in whose house his wife lived from her marriage to the day of her death."

"Then you believe—what do you believe, Frank?"

"What do you believe, Racy?"

Both men were silent.

Horace said at last, with an effort, "Does she know anything of this?"

"No," replied Frank; "not yet. You see," he added slowly, "that the worst is still to come."

"What will she say, Frank?"

"She will say that she is the daughter of a felon."

There was silence again. The handsome boyish face of Horace wore a troubled expression; he was feeling very deeply for his friend. Frank seemed almost an old man beside him that night, sitting rigid in his chair, with one hand pressed tightly on the other.

"Frank," said Horace presently, "Nell and I are very fast friends. There is nothing in the world we cannot talk to one another about. Let me break this to her, and come you then afterward."

Frank waited a moment or two before replying.

"No," he said, "I will tell her myself."

"Let Mr. Meadowsweet break it to her."

Frank thought a moment, and answered, "No, I will tell her myself."

Horace saw that he was fixed in this. Deeper than doubt and fear in Frank lay the belief that by sheer power of love, by proof that Nell herself—be her birth what it might—was all in all to him, he would yet bear down all reasoning of hers, and carry her to himself. But he must be alone; he distrusted all help.

"You remember what you said awhile back, Racy," said he. "That this thing must be proved false, or I should lose her. Well, it has been proved true, but I shall not lose her. Though it were proved a thousand times more clearly than it has been, yet I would win her."

CHAPTER XLIX.

SYMPATHY.

HORACE had lost no time in seeing Nell after his return from France; had called on her, in fact, on the evening of the day of his unsuccessful interview with the family solicitor. He had found a marked change in her. She was very subdued and quiet; her gaiety was hidden away, her eyes were less bright, and her smile less quick to come. The ravages of suspense are rapid, and they had already begun to show themselves in Nell.

But she was full of interest in Horace, and full of sympathy, too, and her questions had soon drawn from him the story of his adventures.

"I shall not see Mabel again till I know certainly what is to be the end of it," said Horace, when he had finished his recital; and Nell could not but smile at the air of grave resolve with which he said it. She had always laughed openly at the bogie he had conjured up, an absurd and utterly impossible phantom which no brain but one as whimsical as Horace's could ever have raised.

But she replied with equal gravity:

"Well, in all probability your torments will not be prolonged beyond another four-and-twenty hours, if indeed so long. The solicitor will be certain to communicate with her at once, and it is not less certain that she will tell me within an hour or two. I wonder, by the way, that she has not already told me of her guardian's death; she must know it by this time."

Even as Nell was speaking, a letter from Mabel was put into her hands.

"Dearest Nell, only think—Guardy is dead; he died quite suddenly in his laboratory, on account of something going off. I was so startled by the news this morning that I couldn't write before. Poor Guardy! I know I ought to be very sorry and cry. I *am* sorry, at least I hope I am; but you know, Nell, I haven't seen him for years, and really the only thing I remember is the very strange kind of trousers he used to wear in the laboratory, and a skull-cap I worked for him, which always made him angry because it did not quite cover the bald part of his head. Ought I to go into black, Nell, or would dark gray with black bows be enough? *We shall know now*, don't you think so? Perhaps Horace knows already. I wish I were a man and could go and do things, instead of sitting here and waiting. Come over if you can, I do so want to see you."

"What a sweet Mabel it is!" said Horace, when Nell had let him glance at the note. "And what a sweet sister, Nell!"

"Yes; but a sweeter wife, Horace."

"Ah!" and Horace sighed again, most pathetically; and again Nell could not keep down a smile.

"You will go and see her, Nell?"

"Yes, of course. I shall go to-morrow morning on my way to the studio."

"Say something for me, Nell. Say that you had no idea a man could feel all that I have been feeling lately. Enlarge on the temptation I resisted to kill Joseph George—resisted for her sake. Only, if she never saw George, she will not know how great the temptation was. Say——"

"There, that will do, Horace. Go away, and leave it to me; and mind that you get to work again to-morrow."

Had it concerned any one but Horace, Nell would long ago have grown out of all patience with that gossamer trouble, which, as she was sure, his irresponsible fancy had created. It seemed so idle beside the deep heart-trouble of her own. But where Horace was affected, nothing was too small or too trivial to catch her interest; and in the stress and torment of those weary days it was something of a relief to indulge her fancy in extricating Horace from his airy dilemma.

She got up early the next morning and started for the studio an hour before her usual time, that she might call at

the convent on her way. She welcomed just then any excuse to vary the day's routine.

She longed to escape from home and the studio, from Teresa's pills and potions, and her own chisel and spatula, and be with Frank where he was working amongst those registers in the river-side churches that she hoped, yet feared, might hold the secret of her birth. But she went on with her daily work so steadily and gently, that one could not have suspected the fever that burned her heart.

Mabel was hard at her musical studies when Nell reached the convent, and the sweet, full voice echoed through the corridors. She jumped up from the piano when Nell opened the door, and stood a moment in the pointed doorway.

"Oh, Nell, how good of you! I was wondering how I should exist until the afternoon, and half thought of going to the studio on the pretence of giving you a sitting."

"A capital thought; you shall come with me now, and spend the whole day; I'll bring you home in the evening."

"I don't believe they would let me go for a whole day."

"Go and ask the Superior; or stay, I'll go myself—you can be dressing."

Nell's sponsorship being accepted for the safety and well-behaviour of her friend throughout the day, she and Mabel went off to the studio.

Mabel, like Nell, was in a restless, impatient state, and glad of a change. The great studio at the Abbey was her delight; and her interest was intense in the portrait bust that Nell was engaged upon, which she considered the highest possible honour to herself.

"Well, I really can't condole with you," said Nell, when she had posed her sitter and commenced to work. "On the contrary, I congratulate you. You are free of all incumbrance; you are your own mistress."

"Oh, but I don't know that. Perhaps I shall have another Guardian."

"Impossible; that would be contrary to every rule of art. One guardian, and no more. He stands in the way until he becomes a mere obstruction and can no longer be tolerated, and then he is removed; that is the invariable course."

"And do you think they will tell me now who I am?"

"You will probably hear immediately that you are Mabel Fawcett, the rich ward of an eccentric guardian, who leaves you his wealth in compensation for his neglect."

"I shan't care about his wealth, if it should only turn out that I am Mabel Fawcett."

"Well, you may be certain that is what it will turn out. No one believes anything else but foolish people like you and Horace."

"How good it was of Horace to go to France and find out for himself!"

"I don't see what else he could have done. I think he ought to have gone long before."

"Well, no, I'm rather glad he didn't. I was dreadfully afraid of a meeting between him and Guardy. After all, it seems to have turned out for the best, if only the end should be right."

For a little while from this the girls were silent. Nell, who was acquiring great facility in her art, worked rapidly; Mabel sat motionless, as she had been placed, and watched, fascinated. She was a perfect sitter, for she could never quite get over the notion that if she "deranged" herself in any way after she had once been posed the modelling would have to be commenced all over again. So she would sit without moving a muscle, though her neck ached, until Nell gave her leave to rest.

It was in one of these occasional interludes, when the girls were standing on either side of the fireplace, that Mabel said, with a gravity that sat quaintly on her dimpled face:

"Nell, you have never seriously told me what you desire most in the world. I mean—well, you know what I mean—a great deal of love, or a great deal of money, or to be a great artist, or what!"

Nell looked at her, and instead of answering, asked:

"Is it serious?"

"Of course it is. I want you to tell me truly."

"Well, then, I will confess to you what I have never confessed to any one; no, not even to Frank. But perhaps it will shock you?"

"No," answered Mabel quickly, her eyes growing brighter. "Nothing that you could say seriously would shock me."

"Well, then, I think that above all things I desire power."

"Power?" said Mabel wonderingly. "What a strange thing to want! What sort of power?"

"Power to sway others. And I should like my own art to be the instrument of it. A dear dream of mine has always been to make a statue, the beauty and truth of which should first draw every one to look at it, and then stir their hearts to love all good and hate all ugliness, and then send them away to live better lives. I should like to carve a statue such as the Zeus of Phidias, which made men feel when they looked on it that the presence of the god himself was with them in the temple."

Her eyes shone with a momentary enthusiasm, and Mabel, looking admiringly on her, said:

"How beautiful you are, Nell!"

But Nell laughed, and relapsed into the petting manner she generally used toward Mabel.

"You are a flattering puss," she said.

"No, I am not; and I won't be petted. Tell me, would you give up love for power, Nell?"

"Love is power," she answered. "There is no power stronger than the power we have over those who love us. But I don't think I should be content with that only. I want that power, too, but I want besides another and a wider kind."

"But if you marry Mr. Lyne, will you not have almost to give up your own work?"

Nell winced, unnoticed by Mabel, but she said: "If I do it will be only that with and through him I may gain power and influence in a different sphere. But no, I shall not give up my work in any case, not wholly, I mean; he would not ask it of me. Only I look forward to a day when I may be able to work less for money than for the good I may do through my art."

"Well, I wish I could be like you, and hope to do good through *my* art," sighed Mabel. "I'm a dreadfully useless creature."

"What!" exclaimed Nell. "And you with the gift divine?"

"What gift divine, Nell?"

"Your voice, child. What is there in all creation that

lifts men up like sweet sounds? The twitter of a bird on a bush has as much religion in it as many sermons. Sing to me now, Mabel."

"What, here?"

"Yes; what are you afraid of? No one will interrupt us; and I can work better when you are singing. Your voice, dear, will help to make Horace a great man."

"How, Nell?"

"It will be a new inspiration. You know it was after he heard you sing that he began to be in love with you."

"What shall I sing, then?" asked Mabel, who needed no further bidding.

"Sing what Horace and I first heard you sing. Sing me Mendelssohn's 'Hear my Prayer.'" And as she asked it a wistful, almost a weary look came into Nell's eyes, for that same song had other and deeper associations for her.

And as Mabel sang, the past rose up before her, the past that after all was only of yesterday, though it held for her such happiness as comes not to some in a lifetime; and the tears that of late had lain so near the surface welled up, and before Mabel had finished she fairly broke down and sobbed. Those tears told a tale of which none but Nell herself might know the real meaning and the pathos.

She had kept them down, and with what an effort she alone knew. They spoke of utter weariness and despair, of the death of all soft hopes, of the dread of a future in which love would be turned into bitterness.

Mabel stopped her singing, and looked at her friend, bewildered and quite frightened.

"What is it, Nell?"

Nell, who had lost for the moment both the strength and the desire to keep her suffering within herself, who must have sympathy now if ever, let confession take its course, and told all that had been pent in her for days.

"I am wretched, utterly wretched," she said, when she had partly unburdened herself. "It is days since I have heard from Frank, and I know what his silence means. It means that he has learned nothing, or worse than that—that he has learned what he dare not tell me. I know what is coming, Mabel; the worst has not been yet. He will

come to me and say that he has failed, and yet he will want me to marry him; and I dare not, I cannot, I will not."

"But until he comes you must hope. What do you know yet? Dear Nell, I think you are making more of this than you have any need to do as yet. Who knows what has kept Frank away, or prevented him from writing? Think how busy he is every day. Think, oh, think anything but the worst."

"So I have done, but I can't do it any longer. What shall I say when he comes to me?"

"I think that if he loves you very much, and you love him very much, that should be enough."

"*If* he loves me—*if* I love him; oh, there is no 'if' in that. But it is not enough; there is honour. It is not for myself I care, but for him. Oh, Mabel, think what a case mine is, and help me. Show me some way by which I can keep him without wronging him."

"You cannot wrong him. It is wicked of you to think it."

"What, then, am I to do?"

"What can I say? what can any one say? You do not know anything, nor do I. I think that Frank himself will show you a way. But, Nell, you must be very sure that you know what you are doing before you make up your mind to refuse him. It seems to me that real love must be the first rule and the best."

And a faint glimmer of hope stole into Nell's heart again. It is so sweet to hope once more, after one has forced one's self to think that hope is a sin.

CHAPTER L.

NELL'S VICTORY.

"MR. LYNE, miss."

The servant closed the door, and Nell rose, and the two lovers stood face to face.

It was hard to meet in this way. In this room, but a little while before, they had told each other of their love. But for a moment she forgot herself, and thought only of him.

"Come, and let us sit down and talk," she said.

"I have not written, nor seen you, because I thought it better that I should finish first," said Frank, when they were seated close together, and his hand lay on hers.

"Yes, it was better," she answered. "You have finished, then?"

"Yes, I have finished."

"Tell me what you have done, Frank."

"Tell me first, Nell, before I say anything, that you are all to me that you have been."

"Frank," she answered, "what can I tell you that you do not know already? I love you, Frank, and what is there beyond that?"

"You love me as you did? There is no change in you?"

"I love you as I did. There is no change, there can be no change in me," she said ardently, and with a touch of inmost passion in her voice. "Why do you ask me this?"

"Because, love, I am to prove your love to-night."

"You cannot prove it away, Frank. But let us be brave with one another: tell me what you have to tell."

"Let it stay unsaid. What has the past to do with you and me? Is it not enough that we love each other? Let us forget these weeks, let us know nothing but this—that you love me, and that I cannot live without you."

"Then you have no good to tell me, Frank?" and she looked up at him, and the hand trembled that lay in his.

"Is it not enough that in spite of what I know I am yours still, body and soul; that nothing I know or could ever know would alter me in that?"

"But *I* must know, *I* must know, I must know everything," she said, with a gesture of passionate pleading; and then, her manner suddenly changing, she lifted herself, and put her two hands upon his shoulders, and looking full at him, her lips scarce an inch from his—"Tell me, I beseech you," she said, in a whisper almost, and so searchingly that it hurt him to hear. "There is something cruel in it, I know, but the cruelty will not be yours, and no lips but yours shall tell it to me."

"Let me tell you a little only," he said gently.

"No, tell me all. You have found that my birth was not an honest one. Is it not that?"

"It was not dishonest in the sense you mean."

"What then, Frank?"

"I have found that the brother of Sarah Haffenden had no child, but that Sarah herself was married."

"And that I am her child?"

"As I believe."

A sudden gleam of hope shot into Nell's heart, but it vanished when she looked up at Frank, and saw how pale he was, and what a troubled tenderness was in his face.

"Go on, Frank," she said quietly. "You have not told me the worst yet."

"God help me!" he cried impulsively. "I cannot tell you. I will not tell you, Nell."

"You must tell me, Frank!"

He saw that she would not be denied, and he told her; trusting in his own strength to weaken and subdue her.

The flush of deep shame in Nell's face was succeeded by an extreme pallor, and the hand that lay in Frank's grew cold.

"Your birth was an honest one; there is no proof

against that," he said pleadingly, but she did not answer. "Speak to me, Nell," but she made no reply; only she drew her hand from his, and put both hands over her face an instant, and neither moved nor seemed to breathe.

"You must speak, Nell. You said that I must tell you all, and I have done so; but it was because I believed your love was so great that even a worse thing than this might not part us."

"It is because my love is so great that this must part us," she answered.

"Love, you do not know what it is that you say. What is this that it should part us? Are you and I so wedded to the common way that even for the sake of a love like ours we cannot forget the world and be true to one another?"

"We should be truest to one another in parting now," she answered slowly.

"No; we should be cowards, for the sake of the world's opinion."

"Sweet, it is not of the world I think, but of you," and of her own accord she put her hands in his again, and with a soft yielding movement of her body she seemed to give herself wholly to him.

He tightened his two hands on hers, and said:

"It is too late to break now. We are pledged. I will not break with you, and you shall not break with me."

"I look to you for strength, and you are weakening me," she pleaded.

"Let me both weaken and break you. You cannot send me from you, Nell."

"Yes, Frank, I can, but I could not if my love were less. Oh, cannot you see it is because I love you as no other woman ever did or can, that I am doing this? Frank, my darling Frank, for one hour I will let you love me as you will. You shall kiss me, and hold me, and call me the names you did, and for one hour we will forget everything but our love, and then—oh, what is it that I am saying! No, I will not love you, and you shall not love me. Go, go; you shall not stay another moment; I have been mad to talk to you like this," and she broke from him and stood up, and went and leaned her arms upon the chimney-piece,

and broke into a flood of tears. But he was beside her, and had taken her in his clasp, and pressed her head upon his shoulder, and held her close to him.

"No, I cannot go, for you have maddened me too," he said.

But she had recovered, and bitterly repented of her weakness. She lifted a face that was pale but resolute to his, and said:

"Oh, Frank, I am ashamed; forgive me. I did not think that I could fail like this."

"You have not failed, sweet. It was your love that spoke. Yield to that, and let us torment ourselves no longer. What are we two that the shadow of a dead sin should sunder us?"

"I will not yield again, Frank. I know my way now, and I will follow it. Listen to me only for one moment, and you will say that I am right. I do this because I love you better than I love myself. It is of you and not of me that we must both think; of you and your calling, of your place in the world, of your future, of your descendants. It is for this that I will not marry you, and you shall not change me. Oh, Frank, if your love is as mine, you know the torment this is to me, and will end it quickly."

"And so I would end it, love, but not like this. Sweet, you deceive yourself, and would deceive me. The past is dead; should it kill for us the present and the future?"

"What has been has been, Frank, and cannot be undone. My blood is tainted, but I will not taint yours and your children's."

"God! I will not hear you talk of taint. It is a sin greater a thousand times than the phantom sin that you would place between us. I will give up everything for you—my work, my hopes, my very calling—only let me have you."

"I shall not love you if you tempt me so," she said, almost in a whisper, and her voice was faint, and she raised her eyes, narrowed with weeping, to his. "See, Frank," she added, with a smile that gave a piteous beauty to her pale lips, "how fixed I am, and you cannot turn me. And I am very weak and tired. Kiss me once, and say that you love me, and go."

Once in a man's life there is a supreme and final

struggle between the good and evil that make his nature, and the issue lies with the passion that has ruled his past. With Frank, the issue could not long be doubtful. Believing still that he had power to bend Nell's will to his, he sacrificed himself, and gave the victory to her.

"Say that you love me," she whispered.

"I have never loved you as I love you now," he answered.

Neither of them spoke again. But she let him strain her to him till all her body was pained, and he kissed her. Then she felt his hold loosen, and she was free.

She followed him to the door, and stood and watched him go, and he did not look back, but turned into the square at the end of the street, and he was gone.

CHAPTER LI.

NELL HAPPENED TO BE DOWNSTAIRS.

WHAT Horace and Mabel would have done without Nell to play for them the mixed *rôle* of good fairy and go-between, I really do not know.

Neither did Horace, as he found himself on his way to Brompton, to acquaint Nell with his determination to pay a second visit to the family solicitor. That person, Horace thought, was iniquitously slow in winding up the affairs of the late Mr. Fawcett, and announcing the terms of his will; though, I may say, a week had not yet elapsed since his interview with the solicitor in Bedford Row.

It was quite characteristic of Horace that he should go to tell Nell what he meant to do before he did it. The indecisive young man always required approval of and support in his purposes before he attempted to realise them: and Nell was the other self in whose weightier judgment he placed absolute reliance.

Was Miss Haffenden at home? It was evening, so Horace had felt certain of finding his friend within. Yes, Miss Haffenden was at home; Mr. Monteith would find her in her room upstairs. Thank you, no: Mr. Monteith did not require to be conducted to the upper landing; he had mounted before, and knew the ascent well.

He ran up two steps at a time, and knocked at the door of Nell's little sitting-room, but without waiting to hear her familiar "come in," he opened the door and entered.

A reading-lamp stood in the centre of the small round table. Its wide shade, with heavy fringe, made partial darkness in the room, throwing the light in a white ring on the table beneath.

Horace looked round, trying to see Nell in the gloom, but failed to discover her. The room seemed empty, and Horace was moving towards man's natural resort, the fire-place, when a small figure appeared to rise up from beneath his feet and stood before him, uncertain whether to take flight or to remain.

"Mabel!"

Yes, it was Mabel.

Now, as Mabel was the very last person that Horace expected to see, and Horace was certainly not the person that Mabel expected to see, and the present relation between these two being what the reader already knows it to be, a certain foolishness and embarrassment were not unnatural feelings on either side.

But as Mabel stood there, not three feet distant from him, another feeling rose up quickly in Horace's mind, and he was conscious all in an instant of the ridiculous part that he had lately played. He made one impulsive step forward, and took Mabel's hand in his.

"You have seen the solicitor?" exclaimed Mabel, who could not on any other hypothesis explain this masterful proceeding.

"I—well—that is, you know——"

"And he has told you everything?"

"On the contrary, he would not tell me anything."

"Then," answered Mabel, attempting to free herself, "you must not do this."

"I must, and I will," said Horace; and he held her tighter than before. "I have kept back long enough, sweet Mabel," he went on. "I believe that I have been an egregious fool all this while. Your guardian——"

"I have not got a guardian, Horace."

"Your late guardian," said Horace apologetically.

"I never had any guardian, Horace."

"What!" and Horace could get no further, for this unsophisticated child was baffling him in the highest style of art.

"My guardian was not my guardian, but—my father!" and her eyes, albeit they had seemed incapable of such a motion, twinkled perceptibly.

Now, as the instant result of this statement was to make it clear to Horace, not only that there was no harm in his

holding Mabel very tight by the hands, but that there could be no positive sin in taking her into still closer captivity, he at once made such effective use of his superior strength that further explanation on Mabel's part was rendered impossible.

By the time Mabel was released she had forgotten what she was to say next, so she fell back on her previous statement, and said again :

"My guardian was not my guardian, but—my father. And so"—she was beginning to think consecutively again—"and so you see, Horace, I really am myself after all."

"As if you could ever have been anybody else," said the sententious Horace.

"Well, it was you who suggested it, Horace."

"So it was," and Horace, as befitted one convicted of foolishness, dropped his glance and sighed.

"But it has all come right now," put in Mabel, the comforter.

"Yes; I always had a feeling that it would. Forgive me, and forget how stupid I have been. The future is all our own."

"Papa expressed a desire that I would not marry," observed the small lady with gravity.

"Papa has no longer a voice in the matter," was the prompt reply.

"But he expressed a desire, Horace."

"I think he was not so tender of you while he lived that he had any right to do so."

"Papa thought that marriage was quite a mistaken arrangement. Perhaps I ought to respect his wishes."

"Mabel," said Horace, growing superior again, "you are an exceedingly small person."

"Y—yes, Horace."

"It is impossible that you can measure more than four feet ten in your shoes."

'Y—yes, Horace."

"Now, I am at least a foot higher without my shoes."

"I suppose so, Horace."

"Consequently, I am quite the master of this situation."

"I suppose so, Horace."

"And nothing would be easier than for me to lift and carry you away, almost unperceived."

"Nothing, Horace."

"Very well; that is what I shall do if you continue to oppose me."

"Then I will not oppose you any more, Horace."

"It is nobly spoken. Think how sad it would be if I had to commence our new life by punishing you."

"I should not mind being punished."

"Ha! Is this the outcome of a convent training? I shall report you to the Superior."

"Oh, Horace, what is the time? Sister Grace is coming for me at nine. And Nell, where is Nell? She only went downstairs to Miss Gripp; she will be back directly."

"You do her an injustice; she will not return for a good half-hour. But, dear, you have not told me anything yet. I want to know how you learned all this. You have heard from the man Joseph George, I suppose. Did he call on you at the convent?"

"Yes, he came there. How frightened I was! But the Superior was there too, and they were both very kind. Mr. George told me all about everything; it was so strange. Only think, Horace, of your father never allowing you to know that he was your father."

"Why was it that he gave out you were his ward?"

"Because he wanted to keep me away from him, so that he might do his work. It was queer of him to do that, wasn't it? But I always knew that he never liked to have any—any of us about him—women, you know. I think he believed *we* were a mistaken arrangement, too. Mr. George wouldn't say that papa didn't want me, but I know that is what he meant. And you see, if I had lived at home, papa would have had to keep another mistaken arrangement to look after me, so there would have been two of us, and then perhaps he would not have been able to do any work at all. Poor papa! Perhaps I ought not to think unkindly of him. If you have work to do, you really must think of that first, mustn't you? What long moustaches you have got, Horace. And papa thinks I should really be happier at the convent than anywhere else."

Horace pinched her.

"All papa's money is mine, Horace."

"A *fico* for it!"

"I don't know what a *fico* is, but I suppose it means that you don't want papa's money. There is not a great deal of it, to be sure, but I shall keep it all for myself."

"Pooh! baby; it is I who will sign the cheques."

"Horace, I should like to give a great quantity of it to Nell."

"You might as well propose to give a great quantity of it to Juno."

"Don't you think she would take any of it?"

"Juno?"

"How you tease me, Horace! No, Nell, of course."

"Is that all that you know of Nell, little spendthrift? She wants to be poor now more than ever. I mean that she wants to feel herself driven to work."

"Do you think they will never be married, Horace?"

"There may be a miracle. But nothing short of a miracle will marry them now. Nell is fixed."

"Oh, poor, poor Nell! It seems wicked of anybody to be happy when Nell is wretched. Do you know, Horace," she said, with a sweetness that the pen cannot convey, "I think there is only one person in the world I love better than Nell."

"And who is that, my darling?" asked the proud lover.

"The Sister Superior, Horace."

CHAPTER LII.

'TWIXT COVER AND COVER.

NEARLY a week passed. To Jacob, the seven years that he served for Rachel seemed "but a few days," for the love he had to her. To Nell, the seven days that she did not see Frank seemed as it were seven years, for the love she had to him. They were days of worse than loneliness.

As yet she could think only of all that lay behind the present. She was in the midst of the valley; so deep that the stars brought no tidings from "the infinite blue;" and the mists so thick and far-reaching that they veiled the light beyond.

It was on the evening of the seventh day after she and Frank had parted, and Vicar Meadowsweet's last night in town. He was spending it with Nell, and being very loath to leave her at this time, he kept close at her side all the evening, and talked a great deal, and a little more gruffly than usual. Horace had walked home with her from the studio, and the three were drinking tea in the miniature drawing-room. Teresa sat, dyspeptic and pensive, amongst the cushions on the sofa. Tea deranged her nerves, she said, but a little mild society composed them.

Horace had been in the wildest spirits since his engagement to Mabel; did no work at all, but planned heroic and quite impossible enterprises, to be set on foot in the first week of married life. He did honestly try not to parade his happiness before Nell, but it sparkled now and again, and would bubble over too. He was continually wanting her help in some way; no one else could help him to choose presents for Mabel (or for the matter of that, prevent him

from squandering his whole substance on her at once); no one had such a prudent voice in counselling where to choose a house, in a quarter good enough to gratify Horace's ambition, and of a rent moderate enough not to land him in the Bankruptcy Court at the end of the first year. But for Nell, Horace would have made himself a pauper with the airiest grace in the world, in the first month of his engagement.

Frank Lyne was never mentioned between them. Nell never spoke of him, or of the time connected with him, and Horace understood that she desired silence.

"What of these rival Wiclifs?" asked the Vicar suddenly, when the talk had been flagging. "You keep your models as close as mummies, you two. Here am I knowing volumes more about the man than both of you put together, and not allowed to give either of you the ghost of a hint. Not that I care a goose quill about it, you know; only, if you find yourselves at the bottom of the list, don't come whimpering to me that I wouldn't help you." Here Mr. Meadowsweet unblushingly handed his cup to Nell for the fourth time, and being tremendously curious, for he knew that she had made a rough sketch of her subject, he added with a great show of dudgeon, that he thought she might have given him a sight of her model before he went home.

"As for that," put in Horace, "she hasn't given any one a sight of it, and I've shown her mine as much as she liked. I doubt whether she has done anything. She can be very lazy when she likes."

Nell smiled, but would not be provoked into defending herself or talking of her work.

"Mr. Meadowsweet," went on Horace, "tell me what I shall put into Wiclif's hand; a manuscript, or a Bible, or a staff, or what?"

"You must give him his staff; but I don't care greatly about his manuscript or his Bible. What do you say, Nell?"

"I shall give him his Bible," she replied.

"You ought to have an old Bible somewhere that belonged to your aunt. What have you done with it?" asked the Vicar.

"I have got it upstairs; but it is not within centuries of Wiclif."

"Your aunt believed it was printed in the first century

of our era. It is probably some years later than that; but let us see it."

"What is the binding like?" asked Horace.

"I don't think I have ever looked at it," answered Nell.

"I'm sorry I spoke," said Horace.

"You need not apologise. I did not say that I had never looked between the covers."

"Well, now that I think of it," observed the Vicar, "I don't remember to have seen the binding myself. There is a good yard of canvas stitched about it."

"Well, that is easily removed," said Nell. "I will fetch the Bible, and we will see what the binding is like."

She left the room, and returned in a moment bearing in her arms a ponderous volume, which she laid on the table.

Horace pushed the tea-tray out of the way, and the volume was brought under the rays of the lamp.

"An interesting and promising tome," said he. "Well, are we to see the binding?"

Miss Gripp, who had raised herself delicately amidst her cushions to take a critical glance at the Bible, demurred.

Why had the former owner of the Bible, who was now no more, placed a canvas cover over the binding? Who should say what her motive had been? What right had any one to undo what the dead had done? For her part she would regard it as an act little short of impiety to remove the canvas. Miss Haffenden, of course, was her own mistress; but Miss Gripp, for her part, could neither sanction nor approve anything that savoured of disrespect for the wishes of the deceased.

Nell said the cover could be replaced immediately; and taking out her scissors she proceeded without more ado to snip the stout thread which held the canvas in its place. It was the work of a moment. The thread was severed, and Nell turned back the canvas. As she did so, some papers fell on the table.

"Love-letters!" ejaculated Horace; but the next instant he was sorry for his hasty words, for Nell blushed painfully. But every one was now looking at the papers; no one thought of the binding.

"You had better see what they are, my dear," said the Vicar to Nell.

Nell, who but for Horace's impulsive words would not have felt the least curiosity in the matter, took up the first paper, a single sheet folded in three, and began to read it.

Her eyes grew suddenly larger, she uttered a half-frightened cry, and turned with a dazed look from one to another of the audience.

Miss Gripp took out her smelling-salts, and pushed them across the table, and the two men half rose from their seats.

"What does it mean?" said Nell, scarce above a whisper, and handing the paper to the Vicar. "It has nothing to do with me. It says 'Helen Monteith Newman.' Who is she?"

"My sister!"

This from Horace, labouring under the strongest excitement.

"Turn up the lamp," said the Vicar gravely. He scanned the paper, and added, "This is a certificate of birth. Look at the other papers, Nell; they will explain it."

Nell, in much agitation, took up the second paper, which was folded like the first, but consisted of two sheets, closely covered with writing. She made an effort to read it, but her eyes swam.

"I cannot see it," she said; then turned with a gesture half-impatient, half-pathetic, to the Vicar. "Read it, you, and tell me what it says."

The Vicar, too, was warm with emotion. As he stretched out to take the second paper from Nell he knocked over Miss Gripp's smelling-bottle, which increased his nervousness.

"Take away those smelling-salts!" he exclaimed.

At another time such a demand would have meant instant death to all friendship and intercourse between Miss Gripp and Mr. Meadowsweet, but, as it was, she quietly put out her hand and repossessed herself of the bottle without a word.

The Vicar shuffled to a chair beneath the lamp, put on his glasses, and read the paper hastily through. No one spoke. Nell sat like a statue, as still and as pale and almost as cold. Horace, with suspended breath, followed the rapid course of the Vicar's eyes as he gathered the contents of the paper.

At the end of three minutes Mr. Meadowsweet laid the sheets on the table, and, putting his hand upon them, said :

"I thank God for this."

Nell's lips, like her limbs, were rigid ; she could neither speak nor move, but Horace, full of excitement, leaned forward, and asked :

"For what, sir, for what?"

"For this," answered the Vicar, pressing his hand upon the paper. "It gives my girl to me again, as good as I knew her to be."

"Then I thank God too," said Horace.

"And so do I," said Miss Gripp.

Nell said nothing, her eyes were riveted to the paper which lay beneath the Vicar's hand.

"But read, read, sir!" broke out Horace again.

"So I will, with the leave of my dear child here," replied Mr. Meadowsweet, whose face was quite pale, and his eyes blurred with moisture. "But first for the certificate. It is Nell's. Nell herself is Helen Monteith Newman."

"How?" asked Nell, speaking slowly and faintly, for the first time. "And why Newman?"

"Newman," said Horace, "was my mother's maiden name. Her marriage with my father was a secret one; she dared not avow it, and her children were registered under her own name. Oh, Nell, my sister Nell!" and Horace stretched out both hands to her.

Nell laid hers in them, and as she looked at him a smile like the ghost of her old one began to creep over her features. But even in that moment her first thought was not of her brother.

"I understand nothing," she said to the Vicar; "will you not read the other paper?"

"It is written," said Mr. Meadowsweet, taking up the paper again, and addressing himself to Nell, "by Sarah Haffenden, who was neither your aunt nor your mother. Hear what it says."

Then he read as follows:

"I write this lest anything should happen to me before I make up my mind to tell my Nell the story of her birth,

and of her coming to me. I know that I ought to tell her at once, but she is so happy thinking herself my niece, and the honest-born child of my brother Dan. How can I bring sorrow on her by telling her that, though the daughter of a lady, she is the child of trouble? Time enough. I will wait yet awhile, but I'll write the story here. I remember as well as if 'twas yesterday the evening the little thing came to me, and the queer way she came. It was the end of wheat harvest; I was weeding my bit of garden at Lechford (it was a rare garden for weeds) when the night carrier came along and stopped at the gate. He lifted a light sort of a wicker basket out of the cart, and 'A present for you, Miss Sarah,' he said. 'For me?' said I. 'Yes,' he said, 'a present for you, Miss Sarah. I had it from a young lady at Twyton to bring with care, and give into your own hand, and here it is, and good night to you, Miss Sarah,' he said, and I said no more, and took and fetched the basket right into the house and opened it. On a pillow trimmed with real lace, and fine lace too, there was the sweetest bit of a girl bairn I ever set my eyes on, and I've seen no sweeter since. She was about a month old, and sleeping like the angels. I pray God keep my Nell through all her life. There was the certificate of birth pinned with a pin to the pillow, and inside that a Bank of England note for fifty pounds, and a half a sheet of fine writing paper, and on it was written, in a beautiful soft hand, 'Take care of her for my sake, and for my mother's—Grace Newman.' Now, the Rev. Newman, you must know, had been the curate in our village, and the salt of the earth, too, and his wife the best that breathed, of which is the Kingdom of Heaven, and a true friend to me. And when she was ill, for she ailed a great deal, the little girl Grace was under my hand for days and days together, and very fond she grew of me, and me of her. Well, about five years before this time I'm writing of, Miss Grace being then fifteen and very handsome, the Rev. Newman and family went to a place in Lincolnshire and Mrs. Newman died there, a good Christian woman. So when this baby bit came to me I saw that poor Miss Grace had gone astray, as folks put it, and got into the sorest trouble a poor girl can come to, and didn't know what to do with the child. I felt very sad for poor Miss Grace, a motherless girl as she

was, but glad to my heart her mother had not lived to see that day, and I said to myself, I'd take and keep the babe whiles I was wanted to for the dead's sake, and for the sake of poor Miss Grace. But very hard put to it I was that night, to know how I should do it, and keep the neighbours from talking, for ours was a long-tongued village. The next morning there comes word by letter that my brother Dan had been drowned at sea, and his young wife at death's door in London, and I must go to her then and there. I told nothing to any of them in Lechford, but put some things together in my leather trunk and a bottle of milk, like Hagar in the Bible, for the child, and left the key of my house with my neighbour, old Mrs. Baynes, and got me up to London. There, after a bit of trouble to find one, I put the child with a tidy wet-nurse, who had one of her own the same age, and then set me on nursing my sister-in-law. But she was a lost one, I could see, the minute I stepped up to her bed. It was the clergyman more than me she wanted, and true enough she didn't bide long. Then when I had given her as fair a burial as I could, and settled her bits of things, and my mind was a bit freer, I wrote a letter to the Rev. Newman, but said no word about the child. He wrote me back that he was near heart-broken, for his girl, his Grace, had left her home, and where gone he knew not, but believed she had been led astray, though he prayed to God that wheresoever she might be she was married. Not a long while after that I saw his death printed in the newspaper; and from that time to this I have heard no word of his daughter, and she never claimed the child. I doubt that she must have died too, for such a girl as I knew her would never have left her child. In London I stayed near three months, and the little 'Nell,' as I called her, was about four months old when I had her weaned, and took her from the nurse-woman back to Lechford with me. I was straitened in my mind what tale I should tell the people there about her, till it came to me that I would let them think she was Dan's daughter left to my charge. For four years nothing went wrong with me, but a lie is a lie, and after four years a sailor that lived in our village and had known Dan and sailed with him to sea came home, and through him it got about that Dan had no child. And as I couldn't show that

he had, and for the dead's sake would not say whose the child was; no, and for Nell's sake wouldn't have her hear an evil whisper when she grew to a girl, I came away from my home, and left my good name behind me. It was then that I came and took the cottage on Martin Clymo's farm, where we live, and Nell the blessing and the gladness of my days, which but for her would have been drear and lonely out of the common. I pray God keep her ever in His godly care. Now I have written this I'll sew it in the cover of the Bible.

(Signed) "SARAH HAFFENDEN."

"That is all," said the Vicar.

"Will some one tell me the right time?" said Horace.

Miss Gripp took out her watch, and answered:

"It wants ten seconds of ten."

"Then show me the way downstairs, sister, and I'll drive straight to Frank."

CHAPTER LIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR THE END.

"It is a mercy," said Nell, putting the last touches to a wreath that was to be worn upon the morrow, "that one is not married every month in the year."

"Do you think so?" answered Mabel, in a tone which implied a shadow of doubt on that subject.

It was just a month since that glowing evening on which the Bible of Sarah Haffenden had given up its hidden treasures, and here were Miss Helen Monteith and Miss Mabel Fawcett, on the last night that they were to bear those names, stitching desperately in preparation for an eventful ceremony that must take place before noon on the following day.

When Horace went off in hot haste to fetch Frank that night, Nell suddenly found herself alone. She had gone with her brother to the door; when she went back to the room it was empty. Miss Gripp had vanished, and with her Mr. Meadowsweet, and Nell was left to her own wild and whirling thoughts. At about midnight there was a noise of wheels without, then a familiar step upon the stair, and then Frank and she were face to face again.

Frank was greatly agitated. Horace had found him in his rooms, working quietly; no external change in him, except that his manner was a little more reserved than usual. Horace was no diplomatist, which was a pity, for the shock of his unguarded and unheralded recital was rather too much for the recipient. Frank had not recovered himself when he reached Nell's presence, and it was a moment almost of pain when they first touched hands again, and looked into one another's faces.

"God is very good to us; I did not think that you and I would ever meet like this again," said Frank.

"Yes, He is very good; I did not think it either," she answered.

"You look ill; have you been ill?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I have; but I scarcely know how it has been with me. But tell me of yourself, Frank."

They were together long that evening. For a good hour and a half no one interrupted them, for this meeting was felt to be almost a sacred one. It was approaching two o'clock in the morning when Horace, who had been consuming the hours with Joe in the basement, risked his life by appearing suddenly in the room with an announcement that supper was laid elsewhere. "And oddly enough," added Horace, "I am told that we are to sup on cold boiled fowl."

"You should say breakfast, rather," said Nell.

Joe, who was always fresher between midnight and three or four a.m. than at any other period of the day, was quite in his element as the president of an impromptu entertainment of this sort. Nothing pleased Joe better than to be sent downstairs to explore the larder at about one o'clock in the morning; and on this occasion, for the first time during many days, his tongue was free, for he had gone about like a dumb creature in the presence of Nell's sorrow, giving her the mute sympathy of wistful glances, and such little nameless acts of kindness as the soft heart within him prompted. Teresa had been cajoled to bed. "Come what may, you must not forget that you still have a complexion," had been Joe's successful argument. Joe made another speech that night, but it would be no kindness to his memory to report it here.

On the day following Mabel learned everything.

"Did I not say that it would come right? I said it long ago, before anybody else did," persisted Mabel; but Nell only answered with a smile; her content lay too deep for words. Then the Hartes knew about it, and everybody knew, and Nell received all their good wishes with the air of one who had suddenly passed under some sweet enchantment.

And then the long-drawn bliss of the awaking! Little by little to be assured of the verity of that which seemed

at first so far removed from sober truth. To feel, as day succeeded day, that she really had in one night regained a lover and found a brother.

There were a thousand things to talk of in those short weeks; how closely Sarah had kept the secret of her own sorrow, not so much as hinting at it even in her last document; how strange that she should never have learned the truth of Nell's story; how, stranger than all, the manner in which Nell herself had learned it; and by how small and trivial an accident, such as might have happened at any time, and yet had been reserved for the chief crisis in her life. Then there were matters to be made clear, through talk with Horace, which Sarah had not explained, because she did not know them. Nell learned that she was the owner of a little fortune, a mere trifle as fortunes go, but one which would make a sensible addition to Frank's income until the regal days of the baronetcy and estates.

And Nell and Horace, and that delightful new relationship of theirs! It was incessantly, "*Brother*, what do you think of this?" or "*Sister*, I want to know——" They were never tired of the names; and yet in a little while these names came glibly enough, because their practical relation to each other had been that of brother and sister, almost from the first.

Frank was unwilling that Nell should break with her old life too suddenly, and would have had her stay on at Harte's studio, at least for a time; but to this she would not consent. She pointed out that her money and his would enable them to take a house in which it would be quite possible for her to have all the space she needed for her own work; and living in the east she would be better able to develop her cherished scheme for giving some of the beauty of art to that unlovely region. Nor need she part entirely from her kindly master and his wife, who on their side overflowed with satisfaction at the happy turn her fortunes had taken. She was to remain at the Abbey until the work for the competition was out of hand, and then Harte said she might commence hopefully to work as her own mistress. Teresa mourned bitterly at the thought of losing her, wept daily, and would have been inconsolable, but that her own particular chemist had nearly perfected the ingredients of

an elixir which he assured her would go far to restore her childhood's bloom. Joe said not a syllable to Nell to indicate the sense of desolation which came over him as often as he thought of the near departure of his queen and idol; but the days which were radiant with happiness for her were full of unspoken grief for him.

While Horace and Mabel were scouring South Kensington in search of a house, it suddenly occurred to Horace that he was the owner of a manor house on the edge of a moor in Yorkshire. He had never lived in it since it came into his possession, for the place was suited only to a sportsman, and to a sportsman it had always been rented. Horace had never visited it but once since the death of the grandfather through whom it had descended to him; but remembering it now, he asked Mabel whether she would like to live in a house in Yorkshire which was seven miles from anywhere and positively known to be haunted. Mabel asked Nell, and Nell said she thought it might do for all of them to go to on an occasional summer holiday when they could muster force enough to be able to despise the ghost, but that as a permanent residence, a house on the edge of a moor in Yorkshire would probably leave many things to be desired. So the Yorkshire manor house was contemned, and Horace and Mabel finally decided on a small and rather costly abode overlooking Holland Park.

In an interval of her perpetual restless going and coming, with Frank one day, with Horace and Mabel another, in the whirl of these eager weeks, Nell bethought her of her friends in America, and wrote to acquaint Miss M'Gee with the doings that had been and were to be. She received in reply an eight-page letter from that energetic young lady—commencing "Miss Haffenden, Dear Ma'am" —which contained some information. Mr. Claypole was on the eve of producing his great work on England and the English people, which was to be inscribed, not to her Majesty, but to Miss Maggie M'Gee, whom the author had recently prevailed on to accept his hand, his heart, and his book, and to share his home in the flowery West. Not that Miss M'Gee, as she was emphatic in asserting, had given up her ambition to occupy the White House; but she

must have a political agent, and Mr. Claypole had promised to go on the stump for her throughout the length and breadth of America.

One word as to Martin Clymo. Mr. Meadowsweet, on the morning after the events related in the last chapter, encountered that unhappy plotter on his way to the railway station. The Vicar stopped short upon the pavement, and Martin stopped too. The Vicar pulled up his collar, and, as his collar rose above his shabby old coat, his wrath rose also.

"I am three parts minded," said Mr. Meadowsweet gravely, "to knock you down."

Martin made no reply, but there was a suspicion of a curl in his lip, for this was clearly an improper style of speech in the lips of an elderly Churchman.

Mr. Meadowsweet observed this motion on Martin's part, and quite unabashed, went on:

"And when you got up I should be four parts minded to knock you down again."

"For a man of God, that's not bad," answered Martin.

"For a man of God, it is very bad indeed," replied the Vicar. "A better man of God than I would have done it without words."

Then a sudden charitable impulse came over him, for his wrath passed quicker than summer lightning, and he took the young man by the button-hole and talked with him. He lost his train by doing this, and had to wait three hours for another, but that was no uncommon experience with Mr. Meadowsweet.

When he had finished talking, Martin was visibly humbled.

"So Nell is a great lady after all?" said he.

"You have heard what I have said," answered the Vicar. "Well, what do you propose to do now, my friend?"

"I think," said Martin, after a moment's hesitation, "I think I'll go and pay her my respects."

"On my honour, I think you might do worse!" replied Mr. Meadowsweet.

Martin did not pay his respects in person. Possibly he thought better of it; possibly, for the clownish nature was strong in him at bottom, he felt there would be a certain

incongruity in attempting to approach a genuine "great lady" on anything like terms of equality. But he wrote a letter to Nell in very respectful phrases, which was acknowledged by her with the utmost kindness. It was many years before they saw one another again. Martin meanwhile had returned to his natural life, and prospered. His devotion to the pigs went not unrewarded, for he earned an enviable name as the best breeder in the country. One may acquire a worse renown.

The wreaths were finished at length, and Nell said it was high time that Mabel were in bed. At the foot of the stairs Mabel plucked Nell by the sleeve:

"Listen!"

A familiar voice was speaking some unfamiliar words in the basement.

"It's Mr. Gripp rehearsing the marriage service!" said Mabel.

"*Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?*" said Joe, taking the part of the clergyman.

"Hum! *I do,*" he replied, speaking his own part.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE EXECUTIONER IS A LITTLE LATE.

"MERCY on us! where's Mr. Meadowsweet?"

It wanted only a quarter of twelve.

Mr. Meadowsweet's unpunctuality was a proverb among his friends. At home, in his own parish, on Sunday morning, he was generally searching high and low for his sermon when the organist was entering on the last bar of the voluntary. He had declared overnight that he would be at Frank's church where the ceremony was to take place, a good half-hour before twelve; but no one had seen him that day.

Horace fumed, but Frank exerted himself to bid the ladies be of good cheer; it wanted yet ten minutes of twelve.

Three more minutes elapsed, and then the situation became strained. A painful silence fell on every one in the church; one almost felt as though the bell should begin to toll. In the midst of this silence a strange sound arose —a "dull deep presaging" sound; one did not know whence it came or what it signified. It grew louder, it seemed to be in the air. It grew louder, it seemed to be located in the tower of the church. It grew louder, and there was no longer any doubt about it; it was a human voice. It became articulate.

"Body o' me! St. Augustine is the greatest man among them. Let me make a note of that."

The face of the verger appeared at the vestry door, and he said hurriedly:

"He's in the tower chamber amongst the books. He's clean forgot us."

The verger disappeared, and presently, high up in a distant part of the church, there was a muffled noise as of one knocking at an oaken door.

"Who's there? I'm very busy."

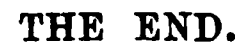
"Five minutes to twelve, and weddin' a-waitin', sir!"

"Eh? Wedding! I thought I'd married them. Well, I'm coming."

The fact was that the verger had opened the church early that morning, and gone home again, leaving the door ajar. The Vicar, arriving even sooner than he had promised, made his way in alone, and clambering to a little chamber in the tower, filled with yellow volumes, which he had discovered on a previous visit, picked out a copy of St. Augustine, and in ten minutes had forgotten everything else.

"Tell them I'm coming," and he shut up the volume, and looked round for his surplice.

"After all," muttered the Vicar, as he groped his way down the stairs, "there's no great harm done. It's always well to give them a few minutes for consideration at the last. You see," he added, presenting himself in the vestry, "when the knot's once tied, you can't untie it in a hurry. But if you're quite sure, all of you, that you've made your minds up, we'll begin."



THE END.

NELL
HAFFENDEN

A.N.